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THE DOCK-BOY SHADOW



OR,
SLEEK SLY'S
SHORT-STOP.

BY T. C. HARBAUGH,
AUTHOR OF "THE BOY FROM DENVER," ETC.

CHAPTER I.

A BOY AND A MYSTERY.

"I SAY, boy! You there! Would you mind running a little errand for me?"

A bright, sprightly boy of perhaps sixteen, with a cheery face and clear blue eyes, stopped and looked at the man who had just spoken.

"THERE THEY GO!" CRIED TOBY, "AND ONE OF THEM AT LEAST IS WANTED BY THE POLICE."

"Yes, you're the boy I meant," continued the rather good-looking and somewhat dandily dressed man, seated on a bench in Battery Park, in one hand holding the stump of a cigar.

The boy came up.

"It's not much of a job; won't take you ten minutes, and here's a quarter for your trouble."

"Toby Tip is always ready for an honest job, so let him know what you want done," responded the street runner.

"Toby Tip, eh? Well, Toby, I'll give you the honest job," and drawing a little memorandum book from his pocket, the man crossed his legs and proceeded to write.

It was after dark, but the nearest lamp threw a light over the bench; so the message was readily written and passed over to the waiting Toby.

"Take it to No. — Broadway, third floor, second door to the right. And be as secret as you can," was the order.

Toby thrust the paper into his pocket and started off on his "quarter stretch," as the gamins would have termed it.

The number was not far away, so it was a quarter easily earned.

"Hi, there, Toby!"

The messenger stopped.

"Is it you, Zip?"

"Don't I look like Mistah Coppers?" laughed the other, coming up and showing the good-natured face of a colored boy of about Toby's own age. "In a hurry, Toby?"

Toby explained matters—that the man was waiting on the Battery bench for the expected answer.

"An' he's down d'ar' yit, think you. Toby, an' you say he wears a soft hat and a crushed collah?"

"Yes, I said that, Zip. What do you know about him—anything?"

"Know d'at he's wanted by d'e police, if it's d'e same coon d'at I seed las' night in company w'id another man standin' on d'e pier lookin' at a boat d'at rocked in d'e river. Has you read d'e note?"

"Of course I haven't, Zip. That would be a breach of good faith."

The darky evidently had no such scruples.

"I kin read. Let me see d'e writin', Toby. You need never know w'ot d'at man wrote if you don't care to."

"I can't do that."

"Well, come down to the water house after you'se t'rough deliverin' d'e note," requested the little darky. "I'll be d'ar'."

The messenger proceeded on his errand, while the other turned toward the Battery.

It did not take Toby long to reach the building indicated. It was a great tall structure, filled with offices.

"Third floor, second door to the right," he mused, as he sprang up the broad stairs and soon found himself in a dimly-lighted hallway far above the street.

At the designated door he knocked.

No one answered him.

He knocked again, with a harder rap; then he tried the knob, but it turned only half way around.

"Maybe no one's in," he said to himself. "Shall I throw the letter over the transom or take it back to the man in the park?"

Toby stood irresolute for half a minute, when he sprang up and seized hold of the crosspiece above the door.

He was encouraged to do this by seeing a faint light in the room beyond the door, and the next moment he was trying to get a view of the interior through a slit in the paper which covered the transom glass.

"Heavens! there's a man tied to a chair in there!" burst from the boy's lips.

He stared but a moment—long enough to confirm his discovery; then he dropped to the floor.

"I wish I had brought Zip along," thought he. "He's as slim as a weasel and could wriggle his body in over the door, but I don't think I can do it quite."

He thought of raising the alarm, but decided otherwise, for the next moment he sprang to the transom again, and, resting one foot on the knob, he took a good survey of the apartment.

It looked like an office, but in one corner was a low couch, as if the occupant of the place slept there.

Nothing seemed to have been disturbed; there were no signs of a struggle, but all the same, a man occupied a chair with his head pressed against the back of it and his arms bound to the sides with cords.

"It's murder, maybe!" flashed through the lad's mind, and that seemed to determine him, for he began to force his nimble body into the room.

He soon found that this was no easy task, but he was equal to the emergency, and after a while he had the satisfaction of dropping to the floor of the apartment.

A light was burning over a table at the man's right, and it enabled Toby to make another startling discovery.

The man had a gag in his mouth.

This cruel gag kept him from uttering a sound, and the boy at once sprang forward to remove the silencer.

But the moment he touched the man's skin he fell back, with a cry of horror, to the door.

It was ice cold, and the features were fixed like those of a corpse.

The key was in the lock, on the inside, and turning it quickly Toby bounded into the hall.

He went down to the street three steps at a time, and, the moment he reached the sidewalk, began to look about for a policeman.

"There's one," he exclaimed, catching sight of a well-rounded figure in uniform. "It looks like Jason Chipps. Ah! it is Jason. Here goes for him."

In a moment, the policeman, thinking least of all of a murder mystery on his beat, felt a hand on his arm, and looked down into the white face and expressive eyes of Toby.

The boy at once acquainted the patrolman of his startling find, and Jason Chipps, of the Broadway Squad, hastened to the scene.

The door had been left unlocked, and he and Toby soon were in the room, gazing into the face of the dead.

"Why, the man's Martin Manson!" exclaimed the officer.

"Who is Martin Manson, Jason?"

"I can't explain now, but everything will come out now that he's dead—murdered, no doubt, as the gag indicates."

"But the door was locked on the inside. I don't understand that, Jason."

"That's for the detective," was the reply. "Now, Toby, you musn't forget anything about the man in the park."

"I've got him safe here," replied the boy, touching his forehead significantly.

Chipps saw that he had an important case on his hands, and determined at once to inform the proper authorities.

No time was to be lost.

"They'll want you first of all witnesses, Toby," said he. "They will want to know everything connected with that message. Where is it?"

"Here!"

The boy extended the paper, and the big policeman took it, bending toward the light to read.

"Why, this is a bit of blank paper!" he suddenly cried, looking up at the boy.

"It's the same paper he gave me."

"But, it can't be!"

"I've had no other in my pocket for a week. Let me see it. It's the very same."

Toby's face lost color as he looked at the opened sheet, turning it over and over in his hand in blank astonishment.

"Why, it's merely white paper now. Hang me, Jason, if the writin' hasn't lost off!" he exclaimed.

At which big Jason had to laugh.

CHAPTER II.

ZIP'S WATER TRAIL.

The piece of white paper was indeed a mystery to Toby Tip. He was sure it was the sheet which had been folded in his presence by the man on the bench in Battery Park, but at the same time he had to confess that he really had seen the man write nothing on it; he had seen his hand move back and forth over the sheet while it lay on the memorandum book in his lap, but here it was, with not a word inscribed on its face.

"What do you think, Jason?" inquired Toby, looking up at the policeman in his dilemma.

"It's quite beyond me, but the detectives are just the fellows to tell us something about it. We'll hold the paper for them. Don't let it get away from you."

"I'll see to that," and Toby hid it in his bosom underneath his jacket, where he was sure it would be safe.

Chipps summoned the proper authorities to the scene of the mystery, and then Toby learned that Martin Manson was a man of considerable wealth who did a small brokerage business in the room where he had been found dead—killed by some unknown hand.

He had been bound and gagged in the office chair, presumably while the thieves searched the room for wealth, but there was no telling how much booty they had obtained.

"I wish they would put Cleaver upon this case," said Toby to Mr. Chipps.

"You and he are old cronies, aren't you?"

"That we are, Jason. You remember how I helped him find the river thieves last summer?"

"I believe you did, Toby."

"In that I was helped by Zip, my darky chum, but I happened onto the clew first and Cleaver did the rest, as he always does."

The body of Martin Manson was promptly removed from the office to the undertaker's, from whence it would soon be borne home, and Toby was told to come to Mulberry Street as soon as possible.

"Will Cleaver get the case?" he asked the officer who had been summoned to the office by Chipps.

"Quite likely; but that lies with the inspector."

"Well, I'll be on deck in a little while," and Toby bolted from the building.

He first thought of the man in the park and of Zip, who had gone thither to keep an eye on him, so the messenger hurried off toward the Battery, but reached the bench to find it unoccupied; the man had disappeared.

"Toby," said a voice at his elbow as he stood before the bench, undecided what to do, and he turned to look into the big black eyes of the colored ferret.

"W'ot did you find in d'at room?" demanded the "dark" at once.

"More than you ever would guess. I found a dead man."

Zip's cheeks seemed to lose a little color. "W'ot did I tell you 'bout d'at bloke?" he exclaimed.

"He jus' sent you off fo' a purpose. Toby Tip, an' while you'se away he skins out. D'at's what!"

"Did you see him, Zip?"

"D'is bench had a man on it when I came, but all at once it hadn't. See?"

"He lit out, did he?"

"Gone like a June bug—jes' got up and vamooseed d'e place."

"Then you got a glimpse of him?"

"Mighty little more, Toby. I see 'im as he shabs off, but he's a cute one."

"Got clear off, did he?"

"Gone ober to Jersey."

"You followed him to the piers, eh?"

"D'at's my bizness. See? When he shabs off like a skeeter I says to myself: 'Zip, you'se got ter see whar' d'e bloke goes, so as to report to Toby,' an' I went after 'im. Mighty hard trackin' d'at man, for he's as cute as a fox, doubles on his trail haf' d'e time, an' now an' d'en eatin' me all to pieces. But he jes' took to d'e river—found a boat at a certain place an' rowed hisself off to Jersey."

"And you couldn't follow?"

"I can't swim d'e river, Toby; you knows d'at. I can't walk d'e watah, nor kin I fly. d'arfo' Zip Coppers. d'e dock coon, had to stay on d'e New York side o' d'e river."

"Was he like the person I described?" asked Toby.

"D'e same bloke an' no mistake. D'e same man w'ot I seed on the wharf d'e odder night pointin' across the watah fo' his pal."

The boys proceeded to the spot where Zip had seen the man take to the water, and the "dark" shadower pointed out the iron ring to which the boat had been moored.

Across the water shone the lights of Jersey City, and they longed, young ferrets as they were, to cross and strike the man's trail on the other side.

But they knew that this was simply impossible, for the present, at least, so Toby said:

"They're going to put Cleaver on this case, Zip. You know him."

The darky's eyes seemed to dilate with unfeigned pleasure.

"It's ten to one d'at Cleaver will win, too," cried he. "There's few o' d'em evildoers w'ot beats him when he gets to work, an' when we help 'im Toby he's invincible!"

"Isn't he, though?" cried the white boy. "When we help Cleaver, Zip, nothing gets out of his drag-net. You're right."

Toby patted Zip on the shoulder and they went off together.

Toby had not forgotten his call to the inspector's office, and he and Zip proceeded thither.

They had been friends for some time. They had helped the police of New York on more than one case when the trail ran along the docks and piers, their homes, and they were well known to the patrolmen there as well as to more than one detective—especially to one, as our story will reveal.

They did not think of looking back while they made their way toward police headquarters in Mulberry Street, but had they done so, it would have shown that they were watched by a slouching figure which held them in sight, keeping in the shadow of the buildings and slipping along with the noiseless tread of a cat.

Toby Tip was on time when he entered headquarters, and was familiarly greeted by one of the many uniformed attendants.

"They're waiting for you," said the officer, and seeing a wistful look in Zip's eyes he added: "And you can go in, too, Zip."

The door leading to the inspector's private office opened and Toby stepped forward.

He found himself face to face with the Inspector—not for the first time, however—and was told to sit down.

Zip leaned against the wall and folded his arms.

Soon a side door opened and a man of thirty-five, in plain clothes, and a sharp, but good-looking, face came in.

"Cleaver!" cried both Toby and Zip, in the same breath, and the detective smiled as he nodded to them.

In a few moments, at the request of the inspector, Toby was giving an account of his night's adventures, and when he was through Zip told, in his peculiar way, what he had seen.

"Here's the paper which I got from the man in the park," said Toby, handing the mysterious sheet across the table.

The inspector took it and examined it for a moment, then passed it to Cleaver, who held it between him and the light.

"Did he seem to write with a pencil, Toby?" asked Cleaver.

"It looked like a silver pencil."

"Glittered in the light, did it?"

"A little."

"You didn't watch him very closely?"

"I did not, for, from where I stood, the writing would have been upside down, don't you see?"

"Just so!" nodded the inspector, with a smile.

"Did the pencil seem to rest on the paper?"

"Yes, sir."

Detective Cleaver seemed to place his face almost against the paper, and for several moments he was silent.

"We'll test this," he said, in lowered tones, to the inspector. "We'll see what it yields. I happen to have with me the chemicals which we were using yesterday on those forged drafts."

"That's fortunate, Thomas."

Cleaver took from his pocket a little black case, nearly flat and looking like a leather pocketbook.

Toby and Zip exchanged glances as he opened the case and lifted out a phial, which contained an almost colorless liquid.

He laid the writing paper on the table and shaded it partially from the light while he uncorked the phial.

The boys held their breath, for they had great confidence in this crook-hunter, who was their sworn friend.

Some of the liquid ran over the surface of the paper, which appeared to assume a yellowish cast, and both the inspector and Cleaver watched it intently.

"What does it say, Cleaver?" cried Toby, unable to hold his tongue.

"Come here."

Toby sprang around the table and leaned over the detective's shoulder.

There were words on the paper, now; not only this, but they had shaped themselves into sentences, and the astonished boy read as follows:

"She will be at your house at ten tomorrow unless you agree to pay the twenty thousand within the given time. Don't be a fool, but pay like a man and save yourself from ruin and disgrace. This is the last message of any kind. I want the sum named or you are forever ruined."

"SLY."

The detective waited until Toby had mastered the writing.

"Well, what do you think, Master Toby?" he asked.

The boy ferret shook his head.

"It stumps me, Cleaver. But there's one thing that looks pretty sure; the writer of this didn't expect me to find Martin Manson dead."

"Looks that way," answered Cleaver. "We must wait until ten o'clock to-mor-

row," and he put the message into an inner pocket.

"Mebbe dar'il be news from Jersey befo' den," put in Zip.

CHAPTER III.

THE PIER PARDS TAKE A HAND.

When Toby and Zip left the inspector's room they walked together down the street.

The shadower who had tracked them some distance on their way to headquarters had waited quietly for them, and the moment they came out the boys were trailed again, without the least idea that they were under surveillance.

The two pards went to Toby's room, in a building, on a short side street, not far from West Street, and proceeded to go over the situation as it presented itself to them.

The one thing which puzzled the boy ferrets a good deal was the fact that Toby had found the door leading to Martin Manson's little office locked on the inside.

"D'ar's d'e mystery, but Tom will get to d'e bottom of it," the colored boy averred, confidently.

"Yes, Tom will solve the riddle, if anybody can," assented Toby, "but here is another puzzle which mystifies both Tom and the inspector—what the paper said."

"Of co'se d'at's queer," and he scratched his woolly head; "but, I say, Toby, d'e man what gave you d'e papah didn't know d'at you'd find Mistah Manson dead in the office, so why would he send it to him all blank like? D'at's d'e whar'fo' to find out!"

"Manson must have had means at his command to bring out what was on the sheet, just as Tom did."

"Them's my sentiments, Toby. D'ey was in cahoots, d'en, d'at much."

"You know it said that unless he paid the man twenty thousand dollars within a certain time he would be visited by some one to-morrow."

"By a female, d'e papah said."

"And Tom mentioned just before we left that we would have to wait until ten o'clock. That means that he will be there when the person comes."

"Beat Tom Cleaver if youse kin!" smiled the darky, clapping his hand upon the table between them. "Of course he'll be d'ar', an' d'at party will run ag'in' a snag when d'e door opens. But, I say, Toby," again scratching his woolly crown, "d'e dead man didn't tie an' gag hisself. He was left in d'e chair in d'at fix, but he wasn't dead when de' bugglar went off—see?"

"Just what I think," admitted Toby. "He was alive when the man went away, and probably knew who the man was. You see, he couldn't use his hands, else he might have left some record behind like the old man who was found murdered by us last spring. No record in this case."

"Not a sign, Toby."

"You heard what the inspector said about Martin Manson? He was a strange man—a good deal richer than people supposed him to be. He was a widower, and lived with a servant or two up on Fiftieth Street, near Sixth Avenue. He kept that little office down-town on Broadway, though he didn't seem to do a great deal of business, and you remember that the inspector remarked that he didn't appear to have an enemy in the whole world."

"Jes' what d'ey say of a good many people, but d'ey is jes' d'e kind what seem ter have a good many secret, on-the-watch foes."

"You're right, Zip. Now, if the man who went over to Jersey City in the row-boat comes back he must be found. He'll

probably return in the same manner, to avoid the ferries."

"D'en why not go down to d'e dock and watch fo' him?"

"Just the thing. He may not stay long on the other side."

The two boys, "the black and white thoroughbreds," as they were to become known, were soon at the spot, where Zip had seen the stranger take to the river, and being well versed in dock dodges, they managed to swing underneath the flooring and secrete themselves where they could not be seen.

The lights of the two cities shone upon the water, ruffled now and then by passing craft, and Toby and Zip looked across the river and watched the thousand-and-one lights on the Jersey shore.

But it proved to be a long and a lonely vigil.

They now and then saw the gliding boats of the harbor thieves as they shot along the piers, or pulled up to carry off some coveted plunder on the docks.

They heard the measured strokes of a clock which tolled off the hours of that lonely night, and at last Toby, telling Zip to watch, leaned back against the underpinning and soon was asleep.

The white boy did not know how long he slept.

He was roused by voices, and in an instant was all alert, then, in the deep darkness.

Instinctively he put out his hand for Zip, but could not feel him.

Then he called him in low tones.

"Zip, Zip, where are you?"

No voice answered, and Toby leaned toward the river, to see there a boat rocking where none had been when he fell asleep!

Had the suspect come back from Jersey and had Zip followed him up into the city?

The dock dodger did not know what to think of the voices he had just heard, but, while he looked, he saw a man drop into the boat.

Toby crept to the very edge of his hiding-place and tried to make out this figure, feeling sure he would know if it was the man he had seen in Battery Park.

"It's not the same person, so far as I can make out," the watcher said to himself. "It's a smaller man, and I can see that one shoulder is lower than it's mate, and—"

Then he heard spoken:

"Is it all right, Billy?"

"Everything's O. K.," was the reply from the man in the boat.

Then at once another man descended from the pier and dropped beside the one already in the craft.

"Pull out now!" in a commanding tone.

The boat moved riverward, the man with the deep shoulder pulling with the strokes of a practiced oarsman.

All this had not taken much time, but the boy had seen enough to tell him that once more he had encountered the stranger of the Park!

The last man to drop into the boat was this person. He had come back from Jersey, and for what? What meant this second nocturnal expedition across the river?

Toby, alert as a fox now, left the hiding-place underneath the pier and swung his lithe body up over the stringpiece.

The lights showed him the river and the boat; they revealed much of the long stretch of pier, with its piles of goods and motley crowd of workers, but he took no notice of these.

All at once he was startled by the summons:

"Here, my little rat, what have you hid under the pier?"

"Nothing."

"The same old whine. Always noth-

ing. Didn't I just see you swing yourself up from the nest down there?"

Toby was in the grip of a policeman.

"You're new on this beat, aren't you?" asked the boy.

"Never mind that. I know my business all the same."

"Then you ought to know Toby Tip."

"But I don't know any one when it comes to duty."

"Well, then, if you want to know what I was doing under the pier, that boat answers the question," and the boy pointed to the boat and its occupants, still in sight, the faces of the men turned toward them.

"Didn't you see them?" he demanded. "Seems to me if you knew nothing but duty, you would have called those men to account!"

"I didn't see them."

"But you see them now, when they are out of reach. There they go, and one of them, at least, is badly wanted by the police of New York."

"Which one?"

"The man seated in the stern—the big man with the beard, looking at us right now."

"Who is he?"

"That's for Cleaver, Tip and Company to find out—which they will do!"

The policeman did not know what to do, but at last he let Toby go, after lecturing him about hiding underneath the piers.

Toby was glad to "shake" the officer. As no good could come of watching the fast vanishing boat, he left the pier.

Hoping to find or hear of Zip, he proceeded first to their lodging place, and was going upstairs to his own little room, when there came the cry from the hall below:

"Toby! Toby! Help! help!"

It was Zip's voice!

The white boy looked down, but no one was in sight, and he did not hear the voice again.

Toby Tip was dumbfounded.

CHAPTER IV.

ENTRAPPED.

What had happened to his colored comrade?

Toby would know, for a certainty. Down the steps he bounded, to reach Zip's own room on the lower floor.

The door was found closed, but he threw himself against it, and nearly fell headlong into the room, which was quite dark.

"Zip! Zip! Where are you?"

No reply. Only the echo of his own words.

Much alarmed, he struck a light.

The room was deserted.

Toby did not remain inactive, but turned and ran from the room, eager to reach the sidewalk.

He and Zip were not the only roomers in the house near the docks; the old place was, like many of its neighbors, a human beehive.

He nearly ran against a man who came out of a room alongside the hall, and, falling back, he recognized one of the lodgers, a small man known as Jimmy Figgers.

"What's up, Toby?" cried Jimmy.

"Didn't you hear it—the cry for help from Zip?"

"I heard a bustle in the house somewhere, but I didn't think it meant anything."

"It was Zip. He cried three times for help."

"What was the matter?"

"It's all mystery."

"Then I'll bet it was the man I saw in the hall half an hour ago."

"In the hall here? A stranger?"

"That's what he was. He stood right over there when I came in, with his hat

pulled over his eyes, and looking for all the world like the fellow who hung round here last week."

"I didn't see any one strange here last week."

"Well, let it go," said Jimmy. "So you've lost the little coon? I'm sorry, Toby. Good-night!"

Figgers whisked back into his own quarters and shut the door, while the white pard of the lost boy went outside, but saw nothing that gave him a clew to the mystery, so he returned to the hall and to Zip's room to make further search.

"He's been here lately," he decided, noticing one or two things that justified such a conclusion. "He came home after leaving me under the dock. He was here when he called for help, but where is he now?"

Ay, where?

"I'll find him if I have to turn every stone in New York!" exclaimed the resolute lad, once more on the sidewalk. "Zip shall not remain in the hand of the enemy, not if I can help it!"

He turned toward the river in hopes that perhaps if Zip had been seized he might have been carried to that particular lair of the suspects.

He found the docks a little quieter than when he left them, and reached the old hiding place.

With the agility of a monkey he swung himself under the pier and found the retreat.

Everything there was still and dark.

"Zip, are you here?" asked Toby, in cautious tones.

No reply.

He did not strike a light, for the silence was answer enough, and once more he turned toward the opening.

As he did so he glanced over the water where the lights fell, and caught sight of something that danced up and down on the waves like a boat.

It seemed to be approaching, and in a little while it was within hailing distance, but Toby Tip did not speak.

The boat seemed to make a dart for the wharf, and the sharp-eyed boy ferret bided his time.

"Here we are!" said a voice which he thought he recognized.

"Shall I wait for you?"

"No. You will come along this time."

There were two men in the boat—two men who seemed to have a companion who sat between them, and, to Toby's surprise, he noted that the third person was a young girl.

He could not discern her face, owing to the shadows into which the boat had run, but he saw her raise her head as one of the men laid a hand upon her shoulder.

"Irma," he said, "we are in the city."

She seemed to shrink from the lights that dazzled her eyes when she looked up, but the next moment she laughed.

"It's a great place, isn't it?" she said.

"The boss city of the world. There's a fortune here for us, girl."

"I hope so. I'm tired of being poor."

"Who ain't?" gruffly laughed the man who wore a beard like the one whom Toby had encountered in the Park. "Here, Billy, help her upon the pier."

The second man, thus commanded, assisted the girl from the boat to the wharf, and Toby saw that he was the man with the drop-shoulder.

"Jehosaphat! this is luck," he inwardly exclaimed, for the moment quite forgetting Zip. "These are the same fellows who rowed across the river when the policeman accosted me, and here they're back once more. There's mischief afoot and a fine lot of it at that."

He could no longer see the young girl who stood on the pier, and then he fell to

watching the two men who swung themselves up after her.

"Leave the boat where it is, Billy. We'll know where to find it, but if all goes well—why, we won't be paddling across the river, but we'll own a yacht like other rich bugs."

If they succeeded!

What were those people up to?

"Mebbe that's the person mentioned in the letter which Cleaver brought out on the white sheet of paper," flashed through Toby's mind. "The letter said that she would come to Martin Manson at ten o'clock to-morrow. And, then, I'm pretty sure the big man is the one who gave me the message in Battery Park."

By this time he could hear footsteps overhead, and after a minute's wait he crawled from the retreat and stood on the pier itself.

Three figures were just disappearing in the distance, and Toby was in pursuit.

"Good luck and lots of it," he said to himself. "I wish Zip could share in this, but he ain't here, so I've got to follow the trail alone."

For several minutes the boy ferret was given all he wanted to do by those whom he trailed.

The two who walked on either side of the girl knew the crooks and turns of the city's streets, and at last, after almost losing them several times, he ran them down in a quiet street and beyond the door of an unassuming house.

"I don't think Cleaver need wait for the girl till to-morrow," he ejaculated. "I think I can point out the person who is to appear at ten. The man who sent the note to Martin Manson can't know yet that he is dead, though he is liable to find out before the appointed hour."

He waited some time for the door of the little house to open, but was not rewarded.

"I'll post Cleaver now," decided the boy on guard. "I'll set him on this trail, and he can catch the birds before morning."

With the intention of finding Detective Tom as soon as possible the dock dodger bolted off, and in ten minutes' time ran up the flight of steps which led to the ferret's door.

He tried the door, but found it fast locked.

Cleaver was not at home.

As Toby turned to go back he heard a slight noise near by, and the next second he was gripped by a hand that seemed to sink into his very flesh and muscles.

"Got you, too, eh?" exclaimed a gruff voice, as the boy spotter tried to make out the features only partially seen beneath the turned-down hat-brim.

Toby, glaring at his captor, angrily demanded his instant release.

"Not just yet. I'm not catching rats just for the fun of it. I'm catching them for keeps, I am."

"But you don't know who you've caught."

"Don't I, eh? Don't fool yourself, boy! I know what I'm about."

"What do you want with me?"

"I'll show you presently. There! don't try any of your monkeyshines. The jig's up. I didn't just look for you, but all's fish that comes to my net. I was waiting for another fox, but you've come, and that's glory enough for one night."

There was a merciless gleam in the eyes that glowered at him, and a vise-like grip to the hand that nearly encircled his arm as he was led to the sidewalk.

"Mebbe I'll know what's become of Zip now," thought he. "This man must be concerned in his capture, too."

On the sidewalk Toby was led along, the man keeping his grip and remaining close to him.

It was a walk of some ten minutes,

when Toby's captor turned abruptly into a center-block alley, quite dark and narrow.

All the time the dock dodger had taken notice of everything, the turns in the streets, the landmarks as they presented themselves—in fact, nothing had escaped his busy vision.

"Here we are," said the man, halting at last in the middle of the alley and opening a door with a key which he found with his unengaged hand. "We'll see how you'll like the place."

Toby made no reply.

"You aren't quite as chipper as you were when I netted you," he continued, with a laugh. "You don't chirp so much!"

In they went, and the prisoner was led across one dark room into another.

"Stay there till called for!" cried the man, throwing his boy captive from him.

"Mebbe I will and mebbe I won't," said Toby, under his breath, as he heard the door close, and he rose and felt round the room, with nothing to guide him but smooth, bare walls.

Had he fallen into the hands of some merciless wretch—some man who wanted to rid the world of him? It looked very much that way!

CHAPTER V.

DETECTIVE TOM'S STRIKE.

Meantime Thomas Cleaver, special detail, had not been idle.

He was accounted one of the clearest-headed of the younger men of the select corps of crook catchers in New York, and was usually assigned to mysterious cases, which suited him best.

He possessed a keen sense of humor and a store of good nature; therefore he was in the habit of nearly always looking on the bright side of things.

His friendship for both Toby Tip and Zip Coppers had extended over several years, for he had found the bright boys helpful to him in more than one puzzling case.

Therefore he was glad when he learned that the man who sent the letter to Martin Manson had been seen by both Toby and Zip, and he anticipated no great trouble in running him down.

Not that he thought he was the person to whom the death of Manson could be attributed, but he was connected in some manner with the case, for had he not tried to levy blackmail on the dead man?

After leaving the inspector Cleaver made his way back to the dead man's office.

Everything looked as it had before, and so far as he could see, no one had been there since the discovery of the deed.

Cleaver first ascertained that he was not observed, and then turned his attention to the key which Toby had found in the lock and on the inside at that.

As a flash the truth entered the detective's mind.

Manson's visitor had been admitted to the room by the dead man, and upon quitting it he had relocked the door by the aid of nippers from the hall!

This was apparent by slight marks on the butt end of the key.

Cleaver next fell to investigating the room, and soon found that it had been ransacked, but in a manner calculated to disarm suspicion.

Robbery had been the marauder's object.

To effect this Manson had first been overpowered and bound.

After this the robber had slipped out, leaving his victim probably unconscious in the chair, and in this condition he had perished.

It was quite late when the detective left the office, having seen all there was to be seen for him, and in a short time he was on the street below.

If the sharp-eyed inquisitor had directed his steps to a certain quarter of the city he might have met with an adventure in which others of our story would have played a part, but he did not; instead, he turned up at the door of a poor house on a little street which ran toward the North River, and rapped.

He was admitted by a miss of some eighteen years, freckled, but with a taking smile at the corners of her mouth, and Cleaver tapped her familiarly on the shoulder as she led him into an adjoining room.

"How goes it, Nattie?"

"Fairly well, Mr. Cleaver," answered the girl.

"It's a late call, Nattie, but I am here on a little business."

"That's right, Mr. Cleaver. You never have time to drop in just for a social time."

The young girl settled back in her chair and waited for the detective to proceed.

"You told me once, Nattie, that you saw a man watching Mr. Manson, the Broadway broker, in the little park on the next street."

"I remember what I did, but what's happened to him?"

"A good deal, perhaps. You remember how that man looked now, don't you?"

"As well as if he stood before me now. I happened to have seen Mr. Manson, because he stopped me once on the street and seemed to recognize in my face a face he knew long ago. He told me then who he was, and that's how I knew he was Mr. Manson when I saw the man eyeing him in the park."

Thereupon Nattie proceeded and gave the detective a word-picture of the spy, to all of which Cleaver listened with a detective's keen interest.

"Did the spy look resentful?" asked Thomas.

"He looked so dangerous that I thought at one time of warning Mr. Manson in some manner."

"But you changed your mind, did you?"

"I did. I turned away for a moment, and when I looked again the bench occupied by the gentleman was vacant."

"And the spy?"

"Oh, he was there yet. I watched him a little while and saw him walk away."

"Nattie," said the detective, betraying some eagerness on his placid countenance, "it is not too late for you to go out, is it?"

"Not if you want me to go, Mr. Cleaver."

"Come, then. I want you to look at some faces."

"On the street?"

"No. At the Mulberry Street station."

The girl started a little, but Cleaver said with a smile:

"You won't have to walk all the way. I'll see that you do not. You can get back within an hour."

In a short time the detective and Miss Nailor were out of the little house, and the ferret hailed a cab and seated her in it.

They were driven to Mulberry Street, and Cleaver assisted Nattie out and escorted into the police building.

"You have never seen the Rogues' Gallery, eh, Nattie?" he said, with a smile.

"Never, Mr. Cleaver."

"I won't trouble you to look through it," he continued. "That would be too great a task; but I want you to inspect a number of pictures in it."

In a few minutes the detective had placed before the wondering girl a lot of photographs which helped to constitute the famous Rogues' Gallery of Police Headquarters, and she was looking at each one with eagerness.

"That's the man, Mr. Cleaver!" she suddenly cried, laying her hand on one of the pictures.

"Make sure of it, Nattie."

"I am sure. I can't be mistaken. That face is photographed on my mind as it were. That is the man who watched Mr. Manson in the park."

Thomas Cleaver took a good look at the picture, and turned to the girl with a nod.

"Many thanks, Nattie."

"Do you know him?"

"Perhaps."

"Is he a bad man—an old offender, I mean?"

"He isn't a gentleman, else he wouldn't have his picture there, you know."

"I should say not, Mr. Cleaver."

"He wasn't dressed that night as when he had his picture taken for our collection?"

"Not quite," smiled the girl. "He wore a soft hat with the brim over his eyes, but the lights of the park enabled me to get a fair look at him."

Ten minutes later Nattie Nailor was back home and the detective had said good-night.

Cleaver turned away with a look of triumph in his eye.

It seemed to have been an inspiration which sent him to the girl's home, and he had not made a mistake.

Her recognition of the man's face in the Rogues' Album satisfied him.

"She's got a wonderful memory, has Nattie," said Cleaver to himself, as he walked away. "In fact, Nattie is a wonderful girl in more ways than one, and she's worth her weight in gold to us to-night."

Cleaver did not go home, nor did he retrace his footsteps to Mulberry Street.

On the contrary, he turned up far from the scene of his little victory and boldly entered a large tenement-like looking house whose battered front was revealed by the nearest light.

It was not a respectable neighborhood, but this the detective did not mind, since trails often led him into the dark quarter of the city, and there he was often "at home" with its criminal classes.

But to-night he had something important on his mind.

The quest begun at Nattie Nailor's house had led him thither, and he was to take a look for the original of the face in the Rogues' Album.

He seemed to know where to look for him in the old house.

He ascended to the second floor and pushed on to the end of a semi-lighted hallway.

He found a door there, but it was locked.

The detective rapped, and footsteps came forward.

In another instant the door opened, and a man, half-dressed, stood before the detective.

In he went without an invitation, and the moment the door shut the tenant of the room whirled upon him.

"What is it, sir?"

"Oh, it's you, is it?" exclaimed the ferret. "How goes it, Reddy?"

The tall figure in the middle of the room seemed to lengthen a little more and the flushed face, framed with red hair, was poked forward.

"You live here now, do you?" continued Cleaver.

"Can't you see that I do? And, what's more, I'm leading an honest life, too."

"That's good. It's better than dodging the cops, eh, Reddy?"

"A good deal better."

"But what's become of Snowdrop?"

The man shook his head.

"He held this room till recently?"

"I can't say."

"You don't mean to tell me, Reddy, that you're leading an honest life when you say

that you don't know what's become of Snowdrop?"

"What has he done?"

"I only wanted to see him."

"You want him in the drag-net, don't you? I know you, Tom Cleaver!" and the man backed toward the wall.

"You won't tell me, Reddy? You won't let me know where I might find Snowdrop to-night?"

"I can't tell you, Cleaver."

"And yet this life of yours is honest! Man, don't you know that you may be defeating justice by your silence?"

"I don't want to do that, either."

"Of course you don't, but you are doing it. You know what's become of Snowdrop. You could tell me where I can lay my hands on him now."

The man before the detective was silent.

"First tell me what's the charge," he said at last.

"It's very serious."

"Burglary?"

"Worse than that?"

"Not—not murder, Thomas?"

"Some would call it that."

"Then," cried Reddy, striking the table with his fist, "then I'll not shield him. Yes, I know where he is."

CHAPTER VI.

THE DOCK DODGER ON HIS MUSCLE.

Penned up in the dark room to which he had been taken by the man who had captured him, Toby Tip was ill at ease.

He had found the only door of the place, and it was locked.

The footsteps of his captor had died away beyond this portal, and the imprisoned boy could only lean against the wall and give way to reflection.

He wondered if Zip was in a similar place.

Perhaps he had fallen into the hands of the same ruffian; there was no telling.

Toby recalled the three persons he had seen land from the Jersey side, and he doubted not that he had caught a glimpse of the individual who was to be used to extort money from Martin Manson—a scheme which had gone glimmering since his tragic death.

He had tracked the three to a certain house, the location of which he knew, but, shut up as he was, he could not follow up the game.

For some time he remained motionless in the dark room, and then he attempted to force the door.

But as well might he have tried to open a portal of adamant; it was unyielding.

Toby for a little time gave himself up for lost, but it was not his nature to pine long over defeat.

He resolved that the dungeon should not hold him long.

The walls of the place seemed of double thickness and he could make no impression.

More than once he circumnavigated the room, always coming back to the same starting point.

"I must get out!" cried he. "This room shall not hold me. Why, it is keeping me away from the trail and just when I have a clew. I have news for Cleaver. I believe I have seen the villains in this game and he should know what I have found out."

All at once Toby stopped on one of his futile rounds and bent toward the wall at a certain place.

It seemed to him that a sound had come through the wall to his ears, and his heart stood still while he listened.

Some one was beyond the room!

He was sure of this.

Presently there came a tapping on the

other side of the wall, and Toby held his breath.

He responded with similar taps, and the next moment was almost ready to shout for joy.

"It is Zip!" he cried. "He has fallen into the same snare, and he is telegraphing the code which we made up some time ago for just such a case as this."

Tap, tap, tap went the knuckles on the further side of the wall.

"Who is over there?" it said.

Toby rapped back:

"It is I—Toby."

"I thought so. Then you fell into his hands also."

"I was captured by a strange man. I was brought here by him and am in a dark room."

"So am I," was tapped back. "I left you asleep under the pier to watch a man and he led me into a snare."

"Who is he, Zip?"

"I don't know. He is a dark-faced man with a pair of sharp, evil eyes, and he talks harshly."

"That's my man to a T."

"We're in the trap. We must get out."

"Of course."

A moment's silence followed the last word tapped on the wall and Toby thought rapidly.

"I wonder if he has quit the house. If he is still in it he may hear our tapping on the wall."

Then he fell to tapping once more.

"Do you know where we are, Zip?" he asked.

"I don't know exactly, but we came fast and furious, for he was anxious to get me into the trap."

"Is the man in the house now?"

"I heard him go out a while ago."

"That's good—good for us, Zip."

"It's all O. K. if we kin git out," tapped Zip. "If we can't get away what does it matter whether the man goes or stays?"

But escape seemed impossible, for the walls afforded no avenue to freedom and the doors could not be forced.

For some time the two boys tapped back and forth their ideas and suggestions, but all had to be rejected as being worthless.

"Have you matches?" tapped Zip.

"Not a match. He searched me before he shut me in here."

"Just like he did me, Toby."

"If we had a light—"

Just here came a warning signal which broke Toby's sentence, and he listened to a sound which came from a distant part of the strange house.

It was like the closing of a door, and after it all became silence as before.

Zip tapped very lightly on the wall:

"He's come back. Don't let on."

Toby Tip went over to a chair, the only one in the room—in fact, the sole bit of movable furniture in the place—and seized it.

It was an old-fashioned chair, heavy and rough in make, but it promised to become a good weapon.

He carried it across the room in the dark till he could feel the door.

Then he drew back a step and waited.

Perhaps the strange man would open the door and enter to have a talk with him.

If he did—

The bare thought of this probability sent a thrill through every nerve in the boy detective's frame, and he stood erect with the old chair gripped in his hands.

Several minutes elapsed, and then a key turned in the lock.

The door opened softly, but with startling quickness, and closed again.

He was not alone, Toby felt.

He believed that he was standing close

to the master of the old trap, and that he had come to finish the play against him.

Not a word was spoken by the newcomer, but all at once a match flashed up and Toby almost uttered a cry.

"Hello! here you are?" exclaimed the man, who was the same who had trapped him. "You're looking like a little bird in a cage."

"Why am I here?" demanded Toby.

"Time will answer that question. I guess you'd better let it do so."

"You've no right to shut me up in a place like this."

"I haven't, eh? I'm the strongest, my little rat."

"That's true. Might is not right. You know that."

"Come. Don't whine that way. I am the person who holds your future destiny in my hands."

"I am your prisoner. I don't dispute that. But for all that I am falsely shut in."

"Mebbe so, but you're a little meddler."

"How have I meddled with your affairs?"

"You've meddle with them, and that's enough. You can't get out unless you take an oath."

Toby's blood boiled.

"Unless I take the oath you want to impose, I suppose?"

"That's it exactly. You don't suppose I am going to give you freedom without an oath?"

"Then I'll stay where I am!"

The man, who had lit a gas-jet with his match, stood erect in the middle of the room, his ruffianly figure clearly seen in the light, and his mien very dangerous and threatening.

"Just as you like," he said, coolly. "If you prefer this place to the streets and the docks, all right. I sha'n't interfere."

Toby grew furious, but he kept his temper outwardly.

"You don't want to go back to the old places, do you?" taunted the man.

No answer.

"You like the air of this nest better than the breezes on the pier?"

"I want to be out, of course. Who wouldn't after breathing the fetid air of this den? But you can't make me purchase my liberty with an oath of the kind you seek to impose."

The hand of the listener moved toward the jet to turn out the light.

"Reflect a little while, boy," said he. "It all lies with me. I can bury you for life in this place, or give you your freedom, as I see fit."

"But I would have to walk out under bond."

"That's it. You would have to quit the city."

"When?"

"Within ten hours. You could go down to the river front and breathe the air there until you went away."

"Look here," he suddenly cried, stepping toward Toby. "I've a mind to wring your neck. That would be better than having you out under bond."

His look indicated his vicious mood and purpose, while Toby caught up the chair as he stepped backward toward the door.

"Come, you can't do anything with that bit of furniture," cried the man. "Touch me with it, and I'll leave you dead on the floor, you little rat!"

"Then try your hand at it," and springing forward with the chair above his head, the Dodger struck with all his might.

The stranger threw up one hand, but the boy beat it down with the chair, and the next moment he had his enemy covering his head with his arm as if to keep off the terrible missile.

Toby, thoroughly roused, plied the chair with the skill of an athlete.

The chair cracked; then it broke; but the young Samson beat the man into unconsciousness and then snatched the key from his pocket.

With it he tapped sharply on the wall which separated him from Zip:

"I've won the battle! Now for freedom. Zip, I'll let you out in a minute!"

CHAPTER VII.

WHAT TOBY'S EARS CAUGHT.

In a half minute's time Toby was at the door of Zip's prison, and the ebony ferret was out of durance.

"What did you do to 'im?" eagerly asked Zip.

"Come and see," and the boys returned to the silent form on the floor.

"Dat's d'e man, Toby," cried Coppers, stooping over the man. "He's d'e one what cotched me. You'se made a map o' Greenland w'd his face, an' he won't want ter be seen in first-class s'ciety fo' a month."

"I didn't try to spare his face," was the reply. "What shall we do with him?"

"Lock 'im in his own house and tell Cleaver."

"The very idea, Zip. He'll be safe here with the key in our hands."

Toby locked the heavy door on the outside.

"Now for Cleaver's office," he exclaimed. "This is the man who left Martin Manson bound and gagged, or I miss my guess."

To the home of the detective they hastened, but only to find the detective absent, for the door was locked and no answer came to the bell pull.

Toby had already related his adventure while underneath the pier, in seeing the girl and the two men come from the Jersey side of the river, so they resolved to go to the place to which he had tracked them and see if anything was to be discovered there. In a short time they were in the vicinity.

"That's the house," said the white boy ferret, to whose surprise Zip burst out with the exclamation:

"Hit's d'e house whar' Mother Darkness lives!"

"Who's Mother Darkness?"

"Why, d'e ole woman who used ter sell apples on d'e Bowery."

"But does the old apple woman live there now?"

"Hit was her shell a week ago."

They watched the house for a while and then withdrew to a secluded spot and continued their vigils.

But the place was dark and silent enough now and the door did not open.

"D'ar's a back door to d'e nest," said Zip, tired of the long watch. "Hit leads to d'e hall, an', once in d'e house, you might find sum'thin' about 'em."

Toby decided to investigate, and obtaining from Zip all necessary information concerning the interior, the dodger stole to the rear of the house.

In the small back-yard Toby found a window with a broken shutter which he opened and crept in over the sill.

The moment he dropped into the place he heard suppressed voices, and these guided him.

At a door in the long and dimly lighted hall terminating at the front door, Toby halted and listened.

The voices were in the room just beyond.

"You know how to play the game, don't you, Irma?" asked a man's voice.

"I don't forget things easily, do I?"

"No, but it's a bold play. He may fight us—"

"Really fight us, do you mean?"

"He may bitterly oppose us—that's what I should have said. At ten o'clock to-morrow you will present yourself to him and make the demand."

"I'll do that, and I'll show him, too, that it's either adoption or money."

"You've got the pluck, Irma. I see we haven't played this game for nothing. When we've feathered our nest, why, you'll be as good a catch as any heiress in the city."

"But I'm promised," said the unseen girl, with a light laugh. "I am to become Gloster's wife some day."

"Hang Gloster!" growled the man. "There's better fish in the matrimonial sea than Gloster Kane."

"But I've made up my mind. It's Gloster or no husband at all."

"We'll let that go for the present, Irma. Now, you think you know everything?"

"I think so."

"You'll put on a bold face and cry when the right time comes?"

"Trust me for that, too."

"It's bed-time, now. You'll want to look bright to-morrow. It's the play of our lives, don't you see? They wouldn't suspect that a girl from Jersey holds a hand like yours."

"No; but when will the time come for me to know the truth?"

"Hang the truth! I've promised you, haven't I?"

"Oh, as to that, you've promised me often to tell me who I am and where I came from. You will swear again, will you, that Martin Manson was once married and had a little girl who vanished?"

"He had, Irma."

"Now, if she were living, would she look like me?"

"I guess she would. You see we haven't undertaken this game without our eyes open."

"It would be very wrong to have done so. She is dead, is she?"

"Missing for thirteen years; why, of course she's dead."

"Then, if he should accept me for her, there's nothing to keep me from becoming real rich."

"Absolutely nothing, Irma."

Toby, who was eager to look into the room and see what was going on, thought he heard the girl clap her hands with delight.

"Then I'll do just what I've been taught," said she. "I will make him believe that I'm his long-lost child and—"

"You want to play it fine, very fine. I haven't heard from him, and that makes me think that he'll try to be a little stubborn. It's recognition or the twenty thousand dollars."

"Did you see him to-night?"

"No, but I sent him word. I sent it to him direct—put it on paper in sympathetic ink, which he knows how to read, and even if it fell into other hands it would amount to nothing as against us."

"What a sly man you are! I like you because you are going to let me become somebody, so that Gloster and I can be happy with lots of money."

"Certainly. Now go to bed and I'll take a walk out and see how the land lies outside."

Toby heard footsteps approach the door and wisely drew back.

There was a dark spot at one end of the hall and he gained it just as the portal opened.

"That's the same man—my old acquaintance of the park," the boy ferret cried. "It's a pretty game they're playing, and they've got a young girl to rake the chestnuts out of the fire for them."

"Good-night, Irma," said the man, looking back.

"Good-night," responded the unseen girl, and the door was closed.

For half a minute the man remained in the narrow corridor and then moved toward the front door.

"He'll fall into Zip's hands, now," thought Toby. "Mebbe it'll be a trail to the river where the boat is, and perhaps Zip will be tolled elsewhere."

He let the man vanish without following him, and heard a key turn in the lock.

Toby for a moment hardly knew what course to pursue.

He had seen nothing of the person called Mother Darkness by his companion.

He knew where Irma was, but beyond this the house was unknown ground to him.

The young detective was about to quit the place so as to join Zip in the work outside when he heard a door squeak and the next moment Irma stood there before him.

Toby shrank back into the shadows once more and looked at the girl.

She was well built and pretty. Her age might have been sixteen, and she appeared to him like a romping girl from the country.

"It's a shame to put that little thing up to be landed in prison," said Toby to himself. "She's but the stool pigeon of that man and he's playing her in a game already lost."

Irma continued to stand in the hall, letting her face and figure be observed by the unseen boy, and when she moved forward she elevated her gaze and called out:

"It's all right, now, Mother Darkness. He's gone."

The next moment there was a slight noise at the head of the stairs and down the steps came a woman.

Toby craned his neck forward to get a look at her as she landed in the hall, and he saw a slender woman of forty, dark of skin—whence her name—and clad entirely in black.

"Gone, is he, child?" she asked.

"Yes. He won't be back till morning," was the answer.

Mother Darkness went into the room with the girl and the door was shut.

"So that's Mother Darkness, is it?" mused Toby. "She looks a little dangerous, and I must ask Zip how she is to be taken—sugar coated or not."

"Do you really expect to win to-morrow?" suddenly asked the woman's voice, in an incautious tone.

"Why not?" cried the girl. "You don't think Captain Sly would map out this campaign if there was any danger of failure?"

"I'm afraid you don't know the man."

"I do, and he's been good to me. Why, he's given me rings and fine dresses, though I've taken them off for this play."

"I see you have. But look here, child. You don't know this man Manson. He's rich—"

"That's why we've chosen him. He had a little girl once and I'm like her."

"Who told you?"

"The captain did."

"A wonderful man, this Captain Sly," burst out the woman, and there was a sneer in her voice. "Take care that he don't get you tangled in a net from which there's no getting out."

"Do you mean to betray us?"

"Not for the world, child, not for the universe. I was just givin' you a bit of advice. There, sleep well now, for you'll need your nerve to-morrow."

Toby again hugged the dark spot, for Mother Darkness was coming forth again.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE TRAIL THAT CROSSED THE RIVER.

Fortunately for the boy ferret, he was not observed by Mother Darkness, and she passed up-stairs, leaving him alone in the hall.

"It's a pretty go, isn't it?" said Toby. "This is about the coolest bit of business I ever heard of, and it's nuts for Cleaver, Tip and Company."

After this he did not remain long in the house, but slipped to the back window and made his exit in good order.

He returned to the spot where he had left Zip, but the colored shadow was not to be seen and Toby concluded that he had followed Captain Sly.

In a few minutes the white boy was going back to Cleaver's den, for he was anxious to find the detective, and this time he met with success.

Cleaver was not in the best of humor when Toby came in, for he had failed to find Snowdrop, notwithstanding the directions wormed from Reddy, and had come back to his little room slightly nettled.

But of his disappointment he said nothing to Toby, who began to acquaint him with his own adventures.

Thomas Cleaver listened intently, for it was an interesting story well told, and at the end of it he said:

"Some one may surprise them to-morrow when Irma comes to Martin Manson's office," the detective remarked. "The girl is as eager to play out this fraud as is Captain Sly, and we may bag the whole lot."

"He's a slick one, is this Captain, Cleaver."

"I know it, Toby."

"But you're his match, and, with Zip to help us, I think we can circumvent the whole lot. But there's the man I left in the little house insensible in one corner. What's to be done with him?"

"We'll see to him right away."

"He may be the man who robbed the broker's office and left him gagged in the chair."

Cleaver started at this suggestion.

It was not the first one of importance he had received from Toby, indeed, it was a poor case if the boy shadow could not offer some good ideas in regard to it.

"We'll see," said Thomas Cleaver, and Toby sprang up at once.

"You'll know the house, won't you?" asked the detective, looking down at his boy companion as they struck the street.

"Don't I know the City Hall when I see it?"

"Of course, Toby. It's a little house, eh?"

"Big enough to be a dangerous place, and one fixed up to hold just such birds as me and Zip."

Toby led Cleaver to the scene of his adventures with his former captor, and both paused in the immediate vicinity to see how matters stood.

On the way to the place the detective had put this and that together, and had about made up his mind that the man was from Toby's description no less a person than Snowdrop—the very one he wanted.

They found the old house quiet enough.

Toby guided Cleaver to the rear of the structure and both effected an entrance.

They made their way to the place where Toby had fought for life and liberty, the house having, ere they reached the room, given out signs of emptiness, and Cleaver struck a match.

"Gone!" cried Toby, with a glance.

The detective leaned forward and stared at the corner where the boys had left their enemy.

The corner was empty.

"Here's blood. You see I drew it,

Thomas!" exclaimed Toby, pointing to a dark spot on the floor.

"First blood for Toby Tip," smiled Cleaver, as he stooped and looked eagerly at the stain.

"But the man's gone. There's the chair broken. It fell from my hand almost in pieces when I let up on him. He didn't stay to fix it."

"Why should he, Toby?"

A search of the house revealed that it was not tenanted.

There were abundant signs of recent habitation, but the keen eyes of Detective Cleaver and his boy pard failed to unearth the man with the bruised face.

"It's a presto, gone! sort of affair, eh, Thomas?" said Toby, looking up into Cleaver's face.

"It's a vanishment like others we've seen, you know. The man's simply changed his hiding place."

"He'll fix his face up himself, for to call on a professional face fixer would be to betray him."

"Exactly. We'll find him, don't fear, Toby. This man is important, and because we've lost him to-night is no prophecy that he'll remain lost."

"Oh," smiled the boy, "we miss it now and then in the start, but when we pull in the net the fish is always there, eh, Thomas?"

"Always, Toby," responded the detective, with a significant nod, and then they made their way back to the street.

"When the girl comes to-morrow you'll see her, I suppose," continued Toby.

"Perhaps. She'll be seen, at any rate."

"But if Captain Sly finds out that Martin Manson is dead there may be no call by Irma at the broker's office."

"That's true. If this man Captain Sly makes a discovery of this kind the girl won't show up."

"Then we'll pounce upon them at Mother Darkness's. I would like to hear a report from Zip."

"Where will he look for you when he has had his trail out?"

"At the old rooms."

"Then go there and wait for him. He may be there now."

"I'll see."

Toby and Cleaver separated and the boy detective made his way to the house where he and Zip had rooms, and ran up-stairs to his own little pen.

Zip was not there.

A visit to the colored boy's apartment on the other floor did not reveal him, and Toby went back to wait.

It was getting very late, and the night of many events was past its meridian.

Toby threw himself upon the couch at one side of the room and resolved to take a little rest while he waited for Zip.

He was tired.

The battle with Snowdrop, if the man in the old house was that worthy, had greatly taxed his powers and, then, he had covered a good deal of the city since starting out.

"Wake up, here, Tobe," cried a voice, and at the same time Toby received a shaking which thoroughly aroused him.

"Zip at last!"

"Oh course. You'se didn't think d'ey had grabbed me ag'in? I'se d'e black eel d'ey can't hold."

Zip laughed as he concluded, and Toby waited to hear his report.

"You saw him come out of the house, didn't you, Zip?"

"W'ot's my eyes for, Tobe?"

"Certainly. I thought you'd see him. I was content to let you follow him."

"Which I did. It was a long run, but he took ter d'e water at last."

"The river?"

"D'e ribber," said Zip. "He zigzagged all d'e way, jes' as if he thought he had some one at his heels, but at last he tumbled inter d'e boat."

"And went back to Jersey?"

"D'at's what he did."

"He balked you. He gave you the slip at the piers and you had to come back."

Zip showed his ivories with a grin and his eyes seemed to twinkle with delight and triumph.

"I'se been 'cross d'e ribber, too," laughed the darky detective. "D'is time I made up my mine d'at I'd frustrate d'is yere fly-by-night, an' dat's what I did."

"You're a trump, Zip. You didn't let him get away from you for a moment."

"Not for a little second."

"Well?"

"He was alone. D'e man called Billy—the one what comes ober to New York with him—wasn't along d'is time, so I had but d'e one fox to watch."

"Which made it easier, of course."

"D'at's w'ot. I follered him from d'e ribber into the city an' even d'ar' he was as cautious as an ole fox. He didn't go straight for a single block, but zigzagged jes' like he did in d'is city."

"And you don't know Jersey City so well after dark, either, Zip?"

"But you couldn't lose Zip Coppers ober d'ar', all d'e same. I kept at his heels till at las' he ran into an alley an' jes' dropped out of sight."

"At last, and after all your trouble, Zip? It is too bad."

"Jes' wait till d'is chile git to d'e end o' his string, Tobe," put in Zip. "I only said I lost 'im in d'e alley, but I found 'im ag'in."

"Good!"

"Him come out presently an' look up an' down d'e street with d'e eyes of a hawk. Didn't see me, d'ough, squatted in d'e shadder of a box. When he moved back into d'e alley I went after 'im an' I climb d'e fence what stood d'ar'. Hit was a little risky, Tobe, a little dangerous, but I jes' took danger an' risk an' went in."

"Good for you!"

"D'at man lives in a palace ober in Jersey. You never see anything like his house. Talk about Gould an' Wanderbilt; why, d'ey's poor an' poverty stricken compared to him."

"Living in style, eh, Zip?"

"Common house, but hit's d'e inside d'at takes your bre'f," cried Zip, the darky detective. "Brussels carpet, plecters, pianna, big lamps d'at swing from d'e cellin', and all d'at sort o' thing. Mighty rich man ter be sneakin' back an' forth between New York an' Jersey."

Toby could not help thinking of Zip's animated description of the house over in Jersey, and awaited further narration.

"Hit wasn't d'e style d'at knocked me out," continued the darky ferret. "Hit was d'e way d'at man vanished."

"The way he vanished, Zip? Did he pass out of sight?"

"Well, I should say he did. He jes' walked to d'e table in d'e middle of d'e room, reached up an' pulled a cord overhead an' whar' did he go?"

"Chair an' all?" cried Toby.

"D'e whole thing. It was done quicker d'an winkin', never see anything beat d'at—not even Presto Hermann. Down he went, an' when I look ag'in d'ar' was d'e chair all O. K., but no man."

"It's curious," observed Toby Tip.

"Miraculous!" cried Zip, with dilated eyes. "I tell you, Tobe, d'at man is a match for all three o' us, an' if we beat him we beat d'e coolest rascal we ever tackled. I came back after he went out o' sight in d'at wonderful manner, an' here I is, right side up wi'd care."

CHAPTER IX.

CAUGHT NAPPING.

The new day near at hand in the eyes of the three detectives, Cleaver, Toby and Zip, was to be an eventful one.

Cleaver had set a trap for the girl, Irma, who was expected to come to Martin Manson's office at ten, and by that hour the detective was snugly established there.

The two boys were on the alert in the vicinity of the office, and everything was ready.

The trap had been set, and all that was wanting was the expected game.

Of course the tragic death of Martin Manson had become the property of the argus-eyed reporter, and the detective feared that the accounts would fall under the notice of the man from Jersey and thus balk him.

Still he was hopeful, and waited in the office with varying emotions.

Ten o'clock struck.

The last stroke had hardly died away when Toby and Zip, from their place of observation on the street below, saw a well-dressed girl dodge into the doorway leading to the dead man's room.

"D'ar's d'e bird!" cried Zip. "She's come to d'e snare, an' now Cleaver will 'stonish her."

They could not see her face very well, but from what Toby did manage to see she was the same person he had watched in the hall of Mother Darkness' abode the previous night.

"She's in the trap now, Zip," said the white boy. "She will soon find herself face to face with Thomas, and that will settle the matter."

"Hit will if d'e girl isn't too sharp for Thomas Cleaver. D'ey is mighty cute, d'ese girls am, an' d'is yere one may have been born in d'e right sign."

The girl was out of sight, and the two boys could imagine her entering the room supposed to be occupied by Manson, when, in reality, she would come face to face with one of the cleverest detectives in New York.

"She's oomin' back," suddenly exclaimed the darky ferret. "She's euchered Tom."

Sure neough the same figure they had seen enter the building was emerging and seemed to be in a hurry.

"It can't be that he let her off so soon," cried Toby. "There's something wrong, Zip."

Zip could hardly be restrained from following the girl supposed to be Irma, but Toby held him back.

"Wait, we'll see Thomas in a minute."

But Cleaver did not come in sight, and the prey was fast vanishing down Broadway.

"Track her, Zip. Don't lose her for a second," exclaimed Toby.

"W'ot's my eyes for?"

Zip darted off after the girl, and the white boy ferret entered the building.

He made his way as rapidly as possible to the detective's room, and pounded on the door.

"It's unlocked," said a voice inside, and Toby burst in upon the ferret.

"She's been here," he cried, stopping in the middle of the floor. "She didn't stay long."

"She, Toby?"

"Yes, yes!"

"I didn't see her."

"That's what I thought."

"Strange!"

"Didn't you hear her steps in the hall?"

"Not a step."

Toby looked at Cleaver dumbfounded.

Could it be possible that this fox of the trail had been beaten by a girl?

He had never heard of such a thing before, and was loath to believe it now.

"Was the door unlocked all the time?" asked Toby.

"All the time. I left it open on purpose for the quarry."

"She must have seen something suspicious."

"Perhaps, but I didn't hear her."

In truth, Cleaver was not going to admit that he had dozed a little owing to having lost sleep, and Toby rather suspected the true state of affairs.

"It's very queer," said the boy.

"Singular. You're sure she came into the building?"

"Very sure. There could have been no mistake, Cleaver."

"Which way did she go?"

"Down town."

"And Zip?"

"I sent him after her, and she won't escape him."

The detective was silent for some time and then he said in low tones:

"She may have peeped in here just at a time when I happened to be looking away. This girl is sharp, from what you've seen of her, and she's learned a good deal of her sharpness from Captain Sly."

"Of course."

"And if she did look in here and saw me—"

"Why, that's what frightened her."

Cleaver was disappointed.

He inwardly cursed the drowsiness which had caused him to lose the game, but he did not own up to the boy ferret.

"We can raid Mother Darkness'," said he at last. "That will give us the whole layout."

"Not if the girl finds Captain Sly first and gives him a pointer."

This was true.

If the girl was permitted to get back to Captain Sly she would post him and the birds would take wing.

"Did you tell Zip to stop her under any circumstances?" asked Cleaver.

"I told him not to lose sight of her, and if she goes back to the house where I found her last night, he'll watch it till he gets some information."

"We can trust Zip."

"Always! Zip Coppers is as true as steel, and we can depend on the dusky member of the firm."

Meantime Zip was doing his best.

He had turned after Irma and resolved to keep her in sight as long as possible.

She did not appear to suspect that she was tracked.

She dodged in and out among the crowds on Broadway and flitted along like a moving gleam of sunlight.

No one would have suspected that the young darky was on a trail, so cautious were all his movements.

All at once he saw a man step from a sheltering doorway, and Irma stopped.

There was no doubt that the meeting had been agreed upon beforehand, for the two walked away together.

Zip was very anxious to hear what was being said by the pair, therefore he slipped forward with his usual agility.

In the surging crowds around the couple he was not taken for a tracker, and he managed to have his desires satisfied.

"You're sure it wasn't Martin Manson?" said the man.

"Oh, it couldn't have been. He was too young a person for that gentleman."

"Was he asleep in the chair?"

"Quite so. I opened the door very softly, you see, and stopped there. He didn't hear me. He leaned back on the seat and seemed to be dreaming. I had a good look at him."

"It might have been a visitor waiting for Manson," said the man. "You did right, though—not to go in and waken the fellow."

"I thought I was doing just right, for I suspected that all was not what it should have been. I didn't stay, but shut the door as softly as I had opened it, and left the man to his dreams."

"We'll win the fortune yet, Irma. Don't let this little incident dishearten you."

"It shall not. I'll try again. I want to bring Gloster a good b.g dowery."

At this the man seemed to frown, and his face grew dark.

"When shall I try again?" asked the girl, with some show of impatience.

"Perhaps to-day, yet. I'll arrange that. But you want to have an hour to yourself? You know where Battery Park is?"

"Oh, yes. If I keep right on, I'll find it, won't I?"

"That's right."

After a few words, which Zip could not hear, the pair separated, and Irma moved toward the Battery, while the man turned into another street and disappeared.

"Now fer d'e pretty girl?" said the darky detective to himself. "I'll jes' take a fair squint at her at rest, for she's going down to d'e Battery for a bref' o' fresh air an' to reflect a little."

Irma increased her gait and in a short time led her dusky tracker to Battery Park.

She seemed to look round for a spell, as if seeking a quiet place, but all at once she appeared to espy some certain person, for she uttered a cry of delight and bounded away.

Zip saw a well-dressed young man rise from a bench and wait for her.

He held out his hand as she came up, and the two sat down.

Zip slipped up behind them.

"You got my letter, did you?" asked Irma, eagerly.

"Yes, and it nearly knocked me off my pins. I doubted your words, Irma, for I couldn't think that you had come to the city."

"Oh, I'm here, and into one of the grandest schemes you ever heard of."

"Into a scheme? You, girl?"

"Of course. It's a great thing, Gloster. It will make both of us rich."

The youth drew back and looked at her astonished.

"I can't explain all now," she went on. "I can't reveal the secret, but it's the greatest scheme any one ever won by."

"Have you won?"

"Not quite, but the fortune is within our reach, and we'll pluck the plum in a short time."

"Beware! I hope you haven't let Captain Sly, the man you once told me about, inveigle you into any foolish venture."

Irma started and flushed.

She did not like the admonition.

"I'll take care of that," she replied, with a toss of her head. "I guess I am a sensible girl, and can look out for Number One."

"I believe that, too, but if you trust this man, Sly, you'll get into trouble."

She laid her hand on the young man's arm, and he ceased to speak.

"It's the fortune I'm after," said she. "I want to be rich when we marry, Gloster."

"And I want you to be honest, Irma."

She looked away, and her eyes filled with resentment.

CHAPTER X.

ZIP ENCOUNTERS SNOWDROP.

It did not take Zip Coppers long to see that the pair in the park were lovers.

He continued to watch them till they rose from the bench and the youth escorted Irma from the spot.

A good deal of their conversation was carried on in low tones, but now and then

they grew a little more earnest, and Gloster Kane took occasion to warn the girl of the duplicity of the man known as Captain Sly.

He much distrusted this person, but the girl would not think that he was not working to her best interests, and she once told Gloster that, after all, she might be the long-lost child of the man whom they were trying to blackmail.

Zip followed the couple from the park and saw them separate at Irma's request some squares away.

Gloster Kane looked after Irma and seemed inclined to go forward and stop her.

Zip watched him for some time and at last came up to him and surprised him by touching him on the arm.

"What's wanting?" cried the youth, looking down into Zip's eyes.

"You're Mr. Gloster Kane, eh?"

"I'm Gloster Kane, but what's that to you?"

"A good deal, mebbe. You know d'e young girl what jes' left you?"

"See here! Have you been watching us—playing spy on Irma and me?"

"Mebbe I have, sah, but I've got a right to use my eyes."

"Not in that way! You mustn't watch me, or I'll toss you into the gutter with a broken head."

"If you'll wait I'll git insured fu'st," smiled Zip. "I say you like d'at girl."

Gloster did not know just how to take the boy's inquisitiveness, but after a moment he said:

"What if Irma and I are friends?"

"Hit's all right. I jes' wanted to find out."

"You know now. What of it?"

Zip drew near to Gloster.

"D'at was a good bit o' advice you give her in d'e park."

"You were eavesdropping, too, were you? Don't you know—"

"Hit was sound advice. D'at man called Cap'n Sly is as sly as his handle."

"Do you know him?"

"Slightly."

"And do you know anything about the scheme he has on foot?"

"Mebbe I know a little 'bout d'at, too. Leastwise, boss, d'e girl wants to steer clear o' d'at rascal."

"I told her that and you seem to have overheard my advice. I know Captain Sly. A bigger rascal never lived than he."

"Lives in style at d'at," responded Zip, pointing toward the Jersey shore.

"He always did. He's never at rest unless he's trying to make money easy, and when he's got it he spends it like water and takes things easy. I hate to see him hoodwink a girl like Irma, but he's doing it."

Zip looked at Gloster a little while and then resumed:

"She didn't tell you about the scheme, did she?"

"She did not, and I tried to pump her, too."

"She believes in d'e cap'n."

"That's what hurts me. He seems to have her completely in his net, and it's bad business at that."

"Where did he find her?"

"Irma Baker is a Jersey girl, about whose life there is an undoubted mystery. I half believe that Captain Sly knows what it is, but he does not let on."

"He must have known her parents, who appear to be dead, and he has drawn her into one of his games for the purpose of feathering his own nest, and at the same time give Irma a little stake. It's simply outrageous."

"It beats d'e debbil," exclaimed Zip.

"Now, if some o' d'ese detectives should

catch on d'ey'd pull d'e 'hull lot an' your girl would get behind the bars."

"Heavens! don't suggest such a possibility!" cried Gloster Kane.

"But hit's d'e troof."

"I know it, and the bare thought of it makes me shudder."

"See here! why don't you go an' tell some person what you know about Cap'n Sly?"

"Whom shall I tell?"

"Cleaver, for instant—Thomas Cleaver, d'e best all-round detective out o' doors."

"What, take my troubles to a detective? I can't do that."

"All O. K.," and Zip backed off. "Hit's ag'in' d'e girl if you keep still."

The youth seemed to reflect rapidly.

"I believe you, boy," he said. "It will be against the girl if I hold my tongue and let things take their course. Where is this man—this Cleaver, as you call him."

"I'll take you to 'im at once. Dat's my business."

Again Gloster Kane hesitated.

It was drawing Irma into unpleasant notoriety.

He did not like the thought of it, but he seemed to think at the same time that such a course was best.

"Come," said Zip. "I left Thomas a few minutes ago an' I'll show you d'e boss detective in New York."

They started off together, but suddenly Gloster stopped and refused to proceed.

"I won't! I can't!" he cried. "I must see Irma before I go ahead."

"An' she'll turn you d'e other way."

"I must see her. I can't have a coldness come between us."

"Better d'e coldness d'an a cell."

"Hush! I can't think of Irma behind the bars. Don't talk that way."

"D'en go an' see her."

Zip waved his dusky hand toward the nearest corner and started off.

He half expected to see Gloster Kane change his mind again, but he did not, and the colored boy was soon threading the streets of Gotham alone.

"I didn't quite make it, but I learned sum'thin'," he mentally ejaculated. "He was nearly convinced that it was his duty to go to Cleaver. I thought I had 'im at one time, but he turned the other card an' left me in d'e lurch. But we'll cage d'em all. We'll show Cap'n Sly d'at a slyer man d'an him lives in New York."

Zip now hastened back to Cleaver's office with his information.

He was eager to tell what he knew, and in a short time he was at the door.

This time he found no one at home.

Zip turned back.

Intent on finding Toby, he proceeded homeward and entered the old house where they lodged.

Toby's room was not occupied, and the darky detective sat down in his chair to rest.

It was high noon now.

He had spent a good deal of time tracking Captain Sly and Irma and in his interview with Gloster Kane, the girl's lover.

"W'ot's d'at?" suddenly cried Zip, springing up and starting across the room.

There was a sound in the hall beyond the door, and he ran forward and opened it.

Even at noonday the hall was well filled with shadows, owing to the spidery transoms, but he could see a darkish figure crouching in one corner of the corridor.

Zip looked a moment and drew back.

He crossed the room to a bureau and took from one of the drawers a revolver, with which he turned again to the portal.

"Hit's death to the spy!" thought he.

"Mebbe d'e man w'ot cotched me an' Tobe has come back."

Once more the darky ferret opened the door, but with extreme caution.

As he did so a figure sprang back, and then Zip looked at a man in the hall.

The boy raised the weapon and instantly covered the intruder.

"Don't shoot!" the stranger cried, throwing up his hands.

"I'm on d'e defensive. You can't rob Zip Coppers, no matter if you're d'e bravest robber in the city."

Then the startling identity of the man before him burst like a flash of light upon the darky detective.

They were face to face once more, he and the man who had dragged him from that very house to the place where Toby, after his fight for life, had rescued him.

Zip's mind was made up in a moment.

The station for the precinct was barely a square away.

Why not march this man down there and turn him over to the police?

Why not show him that his days of abduction, if not murder, were at an end, and thus forestall the victory Cleaver expected to achieve?

No sooner said than done.

"You will march down-stairs," said Zip.

"I'll go anywhere if you don't shoot. I mistook the house and I've found that I've got into the wrong one."

"Hit's a poor, poverty-struck excuse, sah, but hit's better d'an none. You will go down d'e steps slowly, for Zip Coppers will be jes' behind you to see d'at you don't git lost."

This did not please the man, but there was no other way out of it, and he turned sullenly toward the staircase.

Zip had already stepped into the hall and was at his back with the weapon in his hand.

"Go on," said the dusky boy at the foot of the flight, and near the sidewalk. "I'se not quite through w'd you yit."

"Not through with me? You don't intend—"

"You're going w'd me to d'e station."

"Never!"

"D'at's what I said, an' Zip Coppers is a boy o' his word."

"Go with you to the station house? I'll die here first!"

"D'en you'll be accommodated, d'at's what you'll be. Hit's d'e station or d'e grave!"

The figure before the little darky seemed to increase in stature and all at once he sprang at Zip like a wild beast.

As quick as the spring, the hand of the boy went up and the next instant there was a flash right in the man's face and he staggered against the building.

Zip was almost horrified at what he had done, but he was still more astonished to see the man recover and with another spring dart away.

In another moment the boy was seized by the arm and he looked up into the face of the patrolman on that particular beat.

Before Zip could explain he was dragged away with the revolver still smoking in his hand.

He did not look after his enemy, but felt that he was already out of sight.

CHAPTER XI.

THE "CAT" ON THE ROOF.

The day passed slowly.

Martin Manson's office was well watched all the time, in hopes that Irma would come back, but Cleaver, who did the watching, was doomed to disappointment.

The girl did not come.

Once more the shades of night deepened, and Cleaver at last withdrew from his vigils.

He had made up his mind to make a de-

scend upon Mother Darkness' house, expecting to find Irma there, if not Captain Sly, but Zip's story about his encounter with Snowdrop on the street had changed his plans.

In a house not very far from Martin Manson's office sat Captain Sly and another man at a small table.

The captain had spread before him a newspaper, and his finger rested on a certain column.

"Don't think the jig's up just because he's dead," he said, looking across the table at his companion.

"I'm half afraid it is."

"Why, you don't know our resources, man. We haven't played the best cards yet."

"What's to play after this?"

"Here, let me tell you. He's dead. Granted. Some common burglar got to him and fixed him, don't you see?"

"That's plain—left him dead in the chair."

"Yes. The police will confine their attention to this man; they will turn heaven and earth to find him, and they won't think of looking for us."

"If I could only think that—"

"You must think it, for it's true. We're safe. We can play our second card now."

"With the girl?"

"Of course. Don't you see that we haven't got Manson to dispute our claim now. We can bring forward all the proofs we want, and the whole fortune will fall into our hands. It's bigger than the twenty thousand we started out for. It beats that all to pieces. Why, I'm glad the burglar got him. It simplifies matters."

"But who did Irma see when she went to the office?"

"I don't know. One of these human foxes, I suspect, but he was asleep in the chair, and she came away with him none the wiser for her visit."

"It was lucky for the girl, I'm thinking."

"Granted. Don't you see that with the documents we've got we can fetch Irma forward as Manson's child? It will be easy to prove his marriage and the files of the newspapers thirteen years ago will tell everybody that he lost a child then."

"That don't look bad."

Captain Sly picked up a cigar and lit it.

"It's the easiest game I ever was mixed up in. And, what's more, the girl is ready for anything."

"She is, only she talks too much about her lover."

"We can curb her after we win the game. Let her go on. It won't hurt her."

"But what if they should meet? He might dissuade her to abandon the play."

"But they won't meet. He still believes that she is over in Jersey, and doesn't dream that she's here."

"She's been on the streets alone once or twice."

"Only took a walk to the Battery, and that's nothing. He wasn't there."

The other man, called Billy Ciphers by Captain Sly, did not take to the idea that Gloster Kane and Irma had not met, but he did not further dispute his master.

"When shall we make the play?"

"It's a little early yet. Say to-morrow. I'll see that Irma goes through with it all right. She'll be acknowledged as Martin Manson's child, and then we'll live in clover."

Billy Ciphers rose and walked over to the window.

The lamps in the streets had just been lighted, and he saw passing figures on the sidewalk.

"I would like to know who fixed Manson?" he said, with a glance at Captain Sly.

"That secret belongs to the burglar himself."

"No doubt of that. He did the business up a little too broad. I don't s'pose he intended to kill him."

"Perhaps not, but in doing it he really bettered our chances."

Billy came back to the table and threw himself into a chair.

"I'd like to ask you a question, captain."

"Sail in, Billy."

"It's about the girl, Irma."

"What about her?"

"You've known her a long time, haven't you?"

"Perhaps."

"From a babe up?"

"I can't say as to that, but I've known Irma a number of years."

"Did she always live over in Jersey?"

"Why shouldn't she, Billy?"

"I don't know why she shouldn't; but did she? That's what I asked you."

Captain Sly was silent.

His gaze wandered from the man on the opposite side of the table and finally came back to him.

The eyes of Billy Ciphers were riveted upon him and they seemed to get an unnatural light while the stare was maintained.

"We'll be richer to-morrow night than we were yesterday," said the captain at last, whereat Billy Ciphers smiled.

It was a direct evasion of his query.

"I'm not talking about the stakes, captain. You seem to forget that I've just asked you a question."

Captain Sly came at him with a hiss.

"You did, I believe. You were talking about the girl—Irma. I can't answer you just now."

"Then you never will!"

"What's that?"

Both men pushed back simultaneously from the table and stood face to face like gladiators.

"You'll tell me now or never!" cried Billy.

"I'll be judge of that. I'll tell you whenever I please or keep the secret till death."

"Now or never, I say."

Billy Ciphers reached the door and laid his hand on the latch.

"I'll get out of the game now if you don't tell me who Irma is," he flashed across the space that separated them.

"You will, eh, and lose every red?"

"I don't care for that."

"When did you turn saint?"

"I'm a thousand miles from a saintship, I am. I'm Billy Ciphers, a rough and tumble outlaw, but I want to know who the girl is."

"What have I told you about the papers we have ready?"

"I know, but are they truthful?"

"They're enough to win the fortune, and that ought to suffice. I can get all Martin Manson's money with those documents."

"And after a while get behind the bars in addition to the coin."

"Not if you keep quiet and play your hand out. The girl? Why, she is the old broker's child."

"Is that true?"

"It's true enough to win by, I say."

"But is she really his lost child? You know."

"Never mind that, Billy. She's near enough kin to get the nest egg for us. There, won't that do?"

Billy Ciphers drew from the door and once more came back to the table, but he did not sit down.

"You're satisfied now, I hope?" said Captain Sly.

"I've got to be, I guess," Billy growled.

"See here, if we should be suspected—if one of these detectives should go back of the returns and look up our antecedents, we might find a stumbling block or two in our way."

"Ha! there's little danger of that," laughed the captain. "I suppose you refer to the note I sent to Martin Manson by the boy in the park."

"What if it fell into some spotter's hands?"

"It would be plain white paper to him if it has."

"Oh, you wrote it with the magic pencil, did you?"

"Certainly. I wouldn't be afraid to let the best detectives in the city have the most damaging letters of mine if they were thus transcribed. I've shown you how safe it is."

"Oh, yes. But I never heard of the boy again."

"He wasn't to come back, you see. There was to be no answer from Martin Manson. He was to come to me in person and say what he intended to do. Instead, he was found dead in his office, according to the papers, and Irma found a strange man asleep there in the chair when she went to see him."

Billy Ciphers looked relieved.

"I had a strange experience this morning," he said, a moment later.

"What was that?"

"As I came back from across the river I found a boy looking at me from the wharf."

"A dock rat, probably."

"Perhaps, but he kept me in sight up into the city. I soon discovered that I was actually tracked."

"You gave him the slip, didn't you?"

"At last I did, only to see him again this evening while on my way here."

"But you got rid of him easier this time, the street being filled with shadows."

"He didn't make much this time."

"That's the way to serve them. You see they can't hoodwink us, Billy. The fortune is nearly in our clutches now, and Irma is going to play her part like a lady."

"If she don't the jig's up. If she fails we might as well pull up stakes and go."

"Wait and see," said Captain Sly, with a knowing look. "In a few hours we'll be worth fifty thousand each."

"There it is again."

"What did you hear?"

Billy Ciphers was at the window and his hand was tugging at the sash.

It was the window which looked out upon the sloping roof in the rear of the building, and the sash was not inclined to yield.

Captain Sly came to his assistance and the two finally lifted the stubborn frame. Nothing was to be seen.

"Did you hear anything?" asked Captain Sly.

"I thought I did."

"A cat, probably. Come, put it down and we'll go."

On the ground beneath the sloping roof stood a slight figure that touched the weather boarding.

It belonged to Toby Tip.

The boy detective of Gotham was on the alert.

CHAPTER XII.

BILLY CIPHERS AND IRMA.

Zip's encounter with the man known as Snowdrop was something in the nature of a surprise to that individual.

Snowdrop, though staggered by the shot, soon recovered, as we have seen, and made off, while the dusky detective fell into the hands of a policeman, who marched him off, but soon released him.

"That's what I call a close one," said

the man to himself, while he continued to make tracks from the scene of the encounter. "That boy did not intend to miss, and I'm lucky to get off as well as I have. Some time, my darky rat, we'll meet and settle old scores, but not just now."

If Zip could have followed Snowdrop he would have tracked him half way across the city to a small place which looked more like a den than a home.

Snowdrop had failed on his mission to the detective's office, but he had seen Zip and had had a narrow escape.

The dusky boy went to find Toby, and the two talked over his encounter with the man believed to be the person who had burglarized Martin Manson's room.

While the day drifted by they looked everywhere for Snowdrop, but the shades of night came on without bringing them success.

They felt that it would be of no use to search the trap where he had been imprisoned, for Snowdrop would not be likely to go back to his old haunts, so they looked elsewhere for him.

"Look yonder!" suddenly exclaimed Zip, clutching Toby's arm, while he called the white boy's attention to a man gliding along the tall buildings near by.

"It's the man with the sunken shoulder—the person who came across the river with Captain Sly."

"D'e same man," was Zip's reply. "D'at's d'e fox we want ter foller jes' now. Don't lose sight o' him an' let Snowdrop go."

Billy Ciphers had just come forth from his interview with Captain Sly, and was making for the ferries.

He walked rapidly, and the boy ferrets followed him.

When near the river he stopped and turned into a narrow street, dodging here and there, but still with the determined sleuths at his heels.

"Now we have him," cried Toby, seeing the man dart into an alley and the next moment open the door of a house near the mouth of it.

Billy had vanished, and he locked the door behind him.

In another moment he was in a rather small room and a young girl who had heard him enter opened a door and stood before him.

It was Irma.

She was startled to see the man there at that hour, but she kept back her wonder and emotion and waited for him to speak.

Billy took a seat and watched her for some time, his lips twitching nervously all the time.

"You're pretty," said he, suddenly.

Irma made no reply.

"You heard what I said, didn't you, girl?" he repeated.

"I did, but—"

"But you don't like to hear of it, eh? I say, Irma, what do you mean letting him hoodwink you in the manner he's doing?"

"Who, sir?" cried Irma indignantly, coming forward, but stopping before she reached the man.

"You know. You know who's making a cat's-paw of you. You know whose chestnuts you are raking from the fire."

"Do you mean Captain Sly's?"

"Exactly. That's just who I mean."

"Be careful!" cried Irma. "You must not talk that way about him."

"Why not? Don't you know that you needn't share with him unless you want to?"

"He's promised to give me all the money I want, and not only that, but I may, after all, be the real heir."

"The lost child, you mean?"

"Yes."

Billy Ciphers leaned back in his chair and tousled his hair with one of his dark hands.

"See here, Irma," said he. "Let's you and I take the whole matter in our hands."

"You don't mean that?"

"Yes, I do."

"That would be wronging Captain Sly."

"Just as if no one has a right to help himself without asking the captain."

"But what makes you turn against him?" cried Irma. "The other day you were enthusiastic over the scheme and told me that there would be enough for all three of us."

"Mebbe I did, but I've got my eyes open and I know what we two can do."

Irma was determined.

"I can't turn against Captain Sly," said she. "I can't go back on the man who has been a father to me for so many years."

"What for, Irma?"

"I've never questioned his motives."

"You never thought of anything, eh?"

"Never."

"Then you don't know Captain Sly, that's all."

"Come, Billy, you mustn't talk that way. Don't you know that you might cause me to distrust one who has been my friend?"

"I don't know as to that, but I know what you'll lose in the outcome when, if you go in with me, you can have the lion's share of the spoil."

"I can't think of doing that, Billy, not even for the lion's share, as you call it."

"But now he's dead—"

"Who's dead?" cried the girl.

"Don't you know? He hasn't told you yet, has he?"

"He's told me nothing."

"You went to the office to face Manson, didn't you?"

"Yes, and I found a strange man there."

"Of course. Manson was unable to be present himself. He's dead."

The girl fell back with a half-suppressed cry and stared at Billy Ciphers, who waited for her to recover.

"Don't you see that the jig's up now unless a fine hand is played?"

"Trust Captain Sly for that, Billy."

"Trust him to make a balk of the whole thing!" ejaculated Billy. "What's the scheme, think you?"

Irma shook her head.

"You don't know, eh? No? He's going to get you into trouble, and you'll lose it all."

"And the dowry I want to take to Gloster?"

"Certainly. Gloster is still across the river, isn't he?"

Irma was on the eve of speaking, but she suddenly checked herself.

"I can't say where he is," she said.

"Gloster will come forward when we have the fortune."

Billy Ciphers rose and stood before the girl a moment.

"Look here, Irma," he said, dropping his voice almost to a whisper. "I want to make a proposition."

"What is it, Billy?"

"It's this: If you'll go in with me and help me with the scheme I have in my head we'll be the rich ones and there'll be but the one divide, with the lion's share for you."

"What is the proposition?"

"In the first place, you must not do anything without my say so. You must lie low till I call you forth. It's a ticklish game. It will take a cool head like mine to play it. You don't know what Captain Sly's done."

"I've never asked him."

"Of course not."

"He's been working to my interest in this matter and he will win if we let him alone."

Billy's countenance fell.

He was afraid he was about to lose the game.

"Now, Irma, if you'll let me play out the hand I have—if you only give me free rein—I'll have the whole fortune in our hands in less than a week."

"I can't see how."

"I can prove to the satisfaction of the courts and all concerned that you're entitled to the money belonging to Martin Manson, deceased."

"That I am really his child?"

"Just so."

"But am I?"

"Oh, it's good enough to say so if you can prove it, ain't it?" grinned Billy Ciphers.

"It would be a bold move—"

"But you might turn out to be the lost heir, don't you see, and if we can make the courts believe that you are what's the difference if it's a little fraud? Nothing ventured, nothing gained, don't you see?"

There was silence on Irma's part and she looked at Billy for half a second without speaking.

"Captain Sly's bound to lose the play," cried Billy. "He can't win no way he can fix it. It's in my hands to carry out the grand scheme. Shall I? Shall I enrich you and Gloster, or see you lose the golden plum forever?"

It was a strong temptation, and the figure before Billy Ciphers seemed to quiver with excitement.

She was thinking of Gloster's last words in the park: "I want you to be honest, Irma," and they now came back to her with terrific force.

"I wouldn't like to take what does not fairly belong to me. I might be the lost heir after all, and Captain Sly knows who I am."

"But he won't tell you. He keeps that hid, doesn't he?"

"Yes."

"What if we do play a little hand crooked and sly? What if we make a good stake with some chicanery? It's done every day in this city."

"That's true, Billy."

"It's done right under our noses and the world's none the wiser for it."

"I know that, too. But all the time I've been hoping that I would be proved to be the lost child of Martin Manson."

"By Jove! I'll prove it if you'll drop Captain Sly and go in with me."

"Where are your proofs?"

Billy Ciphers seemed staggered at this demand, but his quick wit came to his rescue.

"They're where I can lay hands on them within an hour. I can produce them—iron-clad proofs which no court dare gainsay. Will you, Irma? Say that you'll trust in Billy Ciphers and the fortune is yours to command."

"Give me some proof now that I am Manson's child," she said.

"I'll give you all you want within an hour if you wait for me here."

"I'll wait."

Billy Ciphers sprang up and darted from the room.

"I'm in clover!" cried he. "Two shares beat three."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE HOUSE IN JERSEY CITY.

Yes, the "cat" on the roof was Toby Tip. The boy had overheard the conversation between Captain Sly and Billy Ciphers, and he hurried away to take immediate advantage of it.

The whole plot was clear to him now.

It was simply a scheme to get possession of Manson's fortune, and though the old man's death had interfered with it to some extent, the conspirators had not abandoned it.

Toby was quite alone now, for the dusky detective was on another trail.

He did not know where Cleaver was, but he did not look for him.

Toby wanted to find Irma, and to face her with the conspiracy of which he had all the proof he wanted.

He knew that Captain Sly and Billy had not caught sight of him on the roof, for he was out of sight by the time the window was raised, and he had ample time to play out the hand he wanted to play yet, that night.

Zip had told him where the house over in Jersey was situated, and he made for the river.

Toby crossed as soon as possible, and took the route to the captain's house taken by Zip Coppers.

He found the place without much difficulty.

It was not a very fine house, as dwellings go, but Zip had grown enthusiastic over its interior decorations.

Toby did not care to enter the place to make the search he wanted to make without being sure that it was entirely untenanted at that hour, for to encounter some one there might disarrange all his plans.

He gave the house a good looking at from the outside, and at last concluded to get in.

In order to do this he went to the rear part of the place and began.

He found all the windows fastened and the doors locked, but this did not discourage him.

It was some time, however, before he found himself beyond the sill and then he stood in the blackness of darkness.

The place was still enough.

Toby felt his way to a door which was not locked, and the next moment he had opened it.

Suddenly he fell rapidly through darkness and struck against a hard surface, to rise and stagger against a stone wall.

He had simply fallen through an empty trap in the gloom and it was a miracle that he had escaped with his life.

As it was, his senses wavered and in another moment he dropped at the foot of the wall unconscious.

How long he lay there Toby did not know, but when he came to he found himself in the midst of silence and gloom, and could touch a cold wall on either side.

He was still in the house in Jersey City.

It took him some time to collect his scattered senses, and at last he made his way to the steps that led to the floor above and went up until he was stopped by a door.

The trap had been shut since his drop, but by whom?

Toby found that he could lift the door overhead, and did so.

He looked into a room almost dark, but on the floor some distance from the door he saw a streak of light.

He was not the only person in the house.

Some one must have come since his fall through the trap.

Had Captain Sly come home?

This was not unlikely from the conversation he had overheard, and Toby listened a while as he watched the streak of light with great curiosity.

Presently he heard some one moving beyond the light, and then he slipped out of the cellar.

In another moment the door of the other room opened, and a man seen at once to be Billy Ciphers, despite the mask he wore, stepped forward.

Toby had time to dodge behind an elegant sofa in one corner of the room, and

there, crouched like a toad, he held his breath.

Billy Ciphers wore a half-mask which concealed a part of his face, and he stopped in the middle of the room looking about it with keen, searching eyes.

"The dockermments are somewhere. I know they are," he said aloud. "The cap'n told me that he has 'em, and he's put 'em away for safe keepin'."

Billy moved round the room, looking everywhere, opening drawers with the bunch of keys he carried, and looking carefully into every nook besides sounding the walls for secret compartments.

At times he stood very close to the concealed boy detective, and Toby could have touched him by merely putting out his hand.

At last Billy stopped and listened, with one ear against a certain spot on the wall. His eyes fairly glittered in the gaslight.

The wall had given forth a hollow sound and Billy thought he had struck the right place.

"The button's somewhere here," Toby heard him say. "It's not far from the hollow place in the wall. Why can't I find it?"

He looked closely with his keen, hawk-like eyes, and suddenly struck a smart little blow.

"That's it!" he cried. "I thought they couldn't keep the secret very long from me."

The wall was opposite Toby's retreat, and he could see Billy Ciphers open the little treasury which he had discovered.

It was, indeed, a small place, barely large enough for a man's hand, and Billy did not hesitate to thrust in his.

In another moment he had pulled forth a bundle of papers tied carefully.

It made his eyes flash with triumph.

He had evidently found what he was looking after.

As he held the missing package up in the light he laughed to himself and leaned forward to inspect it.

"There's no mistake," said he. "I've got the proofs, and mebbe some which the cap'n didn't intend ter interduce. I'm cock of the walk now, and me and Irma will roll in clover when we close in on the swag."

He took the package over to a table in the middle of the room and sat down.

"I'll take just a peep," he resumed. "I'll take a squint at what I've found, for I can't wait."

He began to open the package, and one by one the documents came forth.

"They're all here! What would the detectives give for these papers? I could make a stake by selling them right off to the police, but they're worth too much to me to do that."

He laughed again.

"Hello! What's this?"

He had taken from the middle of the package a strange looking object like a perfumed sachet and for a moment he held it at arm's length.

"It's some of the cap'n's fancies," he went on. "He's a dandy about sweet smells. Always was. This has a good scent, but I can't say that it smells much like perfumery."

Billy's curiosity overcame his discretion, and he raised the perfumed sachet to his nostrils.

"Heavens!" he cried, flinging the little bag from him and upon the soft. "What infernal stuff is it?"

He threw his hands to his head and staggered from the table where he had dropped the documents; he tried to fight of the subtle agent which in all probability had been left to guard the precious documents, and Toby Tip saw him fall like one suddenly stricken to the floor.

The secret agent must have been a powerful one, for the limbs of Billy Ciphers quivered ere they straightened out and then underneath the light the man lay still.

Toby saw all this with a thrill.

After a while he crept from his hiding place and went over to where Billy lay.

To all appearances the terrible thing had done its work, and the man was dead.

Toby did not spend much time over him, but pushed on to the table where the papers lay.

He snatched them up and ran over them hurriedly.

He saw their importance.

The little door in the wall was still open.

What should he do?

Should he take the papers or return them to the secret place in the wall for a swoop upon the place some other time?

But, then, Billy Ciphers might recover and make way with them.

Toby thrust them into a capacious inner pocket and stepped back.

But first of all he picked up the little bag and flung it into the hole in the wall.

Then he went over to Billy once more.

The man was breathing hard, and, seeing that he was fast recovering, Toby turned off the light.

"Come to at your leisure, Billy," said he, with a parting glance at the man on the floor. "You'll be a little surprised when you do, and perhaps you'll have to explain to Captain Sly. Good-night, Billy."

Once more Toby Tip stood on the outside of the house in Jersey.

He had succeeded beyond his expectations, and the next thing to be done was to utilize the discovery.

In another moment he was starting off, and before long had crossed the river and was again in New York.

As he stepped upon the pier he caught sight of a familiar figure in the act of stepping into a boat.

Toby knew it on sight.

"Good luck to you, Captain Sly," said the boy ferret. "You'll find the nest plundered when you get to it, and you and Billy can fight it out between yourselves."

Toby let the man go, and started up-town.

He was eager to show his find to Thomas Cleaver; he was anxious to take a thorough look at the papers himself, and he resolved first to go home.

He entered his own little room and shut the door carefully behind him.

No one was there.

Toby turned on the gas and took a seat at the table.

He drew the documents from his bosom and spread them out on the oilcloth.

What an army of testimony it was!

He could not help starting more than once as he went through it.

"They've got it all here," he cried. "It's enough to establish the claim. Here's a sensation for the city."

He raked the papers together and prepared to take them to Cleaver.

But at that moment a slight noise behind him threw him into a quiver.

The door had opened.

Toby turned with a start, and found standing there, with demonism written all over his face, Snowdrop, the burglar—the man supposed to be the slayer of Martin Manson, the broker.

It was a thrilling situation.

CHAPTER XIV.

SNOWDROP'S CONFESSION.

The desperate character of his predicament flashed across Toby Tip's mind in an instant.

Snowdrop had come for him once more, and the boy recalled the struggle with the

man in the little house in which he had come off victor.

The burglar looked at Toby a moment and then threw himself across the threshold.

The boy ferret fell back so as to place the table between him and Snowdrop, but the man was as quick as he dared be.

"Hands down!" cried Snowdrop. "Hands down, I say. This time you can't beat me back."

Toby, unarmed so far as a deadly weapon was concerned, stood his ground, but when he thought of the precious papers he had just secured, he realized that to lose them might be to lose the whole game and see Captain Sly and his scheme succeed.

There lay on the table the only weapon that seemed to offer itself to the boy in the peril of the moment—a broken hatchet which he had used the day before to drive a few nails in some loose flooring.

In the twinkling of an eye it was in the boy's hand, and he drew back threateningly.

"Put it down," cried Snowdrop, throwing out his long arms. "You must deliver."

"Deliver?" echoed Toby. "What have I to deliver to you?"

"The dockments. That's what I want, and I don't intend to go away without them."

Toby started.

How did this housebreaker know that he had secured the "proofs" over in Jersey?

Had he followed him from the scene of his success, and did he know the value of the papers even then in his pocket?

"What documents?"

"The ones you just put in your bosom. You know what I mean."

"But what are they to you?"

Snowdrop laughed.

"More'n you think, boy. I know what I want, and that's why I'm here."

"But you can't have what I've got."

Snowdrop seemed to take a long breath, and his face darkened.

"One minute, boy. Just a single minute," he snarled. "You can make up your mind to hand them over or take the consequences."

"You can begin now. I'll not hand over what I've taken."

"Won't, eh? You don't know Snowdrop!"

He came forward with a spring resembling the spring of a lion, and Toby struck wickedly at the bounding figure.

But his hand was caught and stopped in midair.

It was all over in an instant.

Gripped by the hands of Snowdrop, the burglar, the boy ferret could not stir.

"You didn't do it this time, my boy," grinned the man. "This isn't the little house, and you haven't the heavy chair to help you. I don't want your life, but I do want them papers."

Toby was pushed against the edge of the table and bent across it.

The face of Snowdrop, full of evil, came so close to him that he felt the hot, fetid breath on his cheeks.

"Give them here, boy, and you can go free."

Toby struggled, but he could not free himself from that giant's grip.

His coat was torn open, and one of Snowdrop's hands dived into his bosom, seizing the papers and dragging them into the light.

"These are the papers!" cried the man. "I can make a stake with these, but—"

He looked again, and seemed to see that he had made a mistake.

In another instant he had flung the package upon the table, and was looking at it, transformed into a statue of astonishment.

"What a fool I've been, boy," he said.

"I thought so all along, for I couldn't see how these papers would help you."

"That's all you had, eh?"

"All."

"You didn't carry off the papers he kept in the safe?"

"Who? Manson?"

"Yes. Didn't you take those papers?"

"I did not."

"What are those, then?" and Snowdrop pointed at the package on the table.

"You can open them and see."

The man moved toward the table, and Toby saw him pick up the bundle of documents.

In a second he had cut the cord and was tumbling all the papers into a heap on the oilcloth.

The boy ferret watched him eagerly.

"What is all this?" Snowdrop suddenly cried, looking up. "Here's something like proofs. What sort o' proofs, boy?"

As Toby did not answer, Snowdrop returned again to the papers and looked at them with more care.

"Where did you get them?" he asked.

"I found them."

"Not in the office?"

"Perhaps not."

"They weren't there when—"

Snowdrop stopped suddenly.

"You are right. I doubt if those papers ever saw Martin Manson's safe. No doubt he would have been glad to have had them, but they didn't come from his little office."

"They beat me," continued the burglar. "You won't tell me where you got them?"

"Why should I? You seem to know what they are."

"I do. They are proofs that a certain person is Martin Manson's lost child?"

"You knew he lost a child, then?"

"Didn't I, though?" smiled the crook. "I reckon I am the person to know that very thing."

"It happened years ago."

"Thirteen or more."

"They never found her?"

"No; but what say these papers? They describe the child as she was then. They appear to have traced her all this time, and say that the holder of these papers can produce her."

"Yes."

"Then you took them from the man who is ready to produce the girl?"

"Perhaps."

"Look here, boy," and Snowdrop came forward with his face seamed with deep interest. "There's a stake in this for both of us. The man who lost those papers will give a good deal for their return. He can't win without them. I would know the girl on sight."

"You?"

"That's what."

"But, if living, she would be a young woman now."

"Of course. I don't care for that. I would know her."

"How so?"

"Can you keep a secret?"

"You can discover whether I can or not by trying me."

"That's pretty good. I remember when Martin Manson's little one vanished."

"Maybe you had a hand in it."

Snowdrop's face changed color.

"To know her now, one must have known her then," resumed the boy detective.

"That's right."

"Then you must have been mixed up in the disappearance, though you may have lost sight of her all these years."

"Perhaps that's true. You don't want to make a big stake."

"Why not? You haven't tried me, Snowdrop."

"In the first place, what are they doing about the death of Manson?"

"They are after the hand that shut off his wind."

"Who is?"

"Thomas Cleaver."

"The man who seldom misses the fish when he pulls in his drag-net!"

"I see you know him."

Snowdrop was silent for a little while.

"When I went to see him the other night I didn't expect to kill him," he said.

"It was your work, then?"

"It was mine, for with Tom Cleaver on the track, especially if he suspects one, I might as well prepare my side of the case. I didn't go to take the man's life. That was an accident."

"You left him too securely gagged."

"That's it; I overdid the thing a little. He was stubborn, and yet, if he had sat still and let me go through his effects he might be living to-night."

"But you know that that accident will not save you."

"True, boy. I will be candid with you. I went to Manson that night on a little business of my own. I came back to him as one from the dead, and finding him inclined to be stubborn, I bound and gagged him. I may have overdone the matter. I rather guess I did."

"And you saw that we—Zip and I—were picking up a clew here and a clew there, and so you played a little hand against us."

"I did. I made captive birds out of you, but you got the best of me and left the cage."

"Well, what are you going to do?—go and give yourself up to Thomas Cleaver—"

"To that man—never!" broke in Snowdrop. "To you first, boy."

"Very well, then, to me."

"But first be as candid with me as I've been with you. Where did you get those documents?"

Toby reflected a moment.

"Have you an idea?" he asked, looking at the burglar.

"I might guess and miss."

"The girl is in the city."

"His girl? Manson's lost child? Where is she? Tell me, and Snowdrop will give up."

What, tell this man—this wrongdoer—that Irma was, or might turn out to be, the long-lost child of the dead broker, and then see him vanish from the room, to play out a hand of his own, perhaps?

No wonder Toby thought twice before he spoke again.

"Keep the secret, then," cried the burglar. "Don't tell me what you know. They may not hold me for murder, but they can keep me for burglary. I found nothing in Manson's safe. He died after I went away. But Tom Cleaver and you will have all the threads in your hands anyhow, so what's the use of my holding out? Those papers try to prove that somebody is Manson's heir. What if you should lose the girl whom you have found? Don't you know that the man who has lost those documents will take steps to beat you and circumvent justice?"

Toby Tip started at this. The suggestion was terribly true.

Finding himself baffled—finding the documents missing—Captain Sly might turn on Irma like a devouring lion.

"He shall not!" cried Toby. "I say he shall not do this thing!"

CHAPTER XV.

CONFRONTED BY HIS MASTER.

Toby Tip was sure, from having seen Captain Sly take to the river, that the schemer would go to the house in Jersey City and find that the papers had been carried off.

Perhaps he would find Billy Ciphers there, the man nearly finished by the subtle protector which he had left with the documents for that very purpose, and Toby could imagine the scene which would take place.

The boy detective was determined that the captain should not injure Irma, as he might try to do when he discovered that the papers were gone, and after his interview with Snowdrop, he resolved to hunt the girl up at once.

In a little while he was on the street, and soon reached the place where the girl had last been seen by the detectives.

Captain Sly had already reached the house in Jersey and gone straight to the room where the documents were supposed to be hidden.

Something, however, stopped him in the middle of the chamber, and he looked at the arrangement of the furniture.

He seemed to guess that the place had been visited.

"Some one's been here," he said. "I've had a visitor. What if one of the trailers has come across? I'll soon see."

He pressed the button on the wall and opened the little door near by.

In another moment Captain Sly fell back with a white face, for nothing lay in the place but the strangely smelling sachet which Toby had returned to it.

"Gone! Robbed!" cried the man, flushing. "I've been tracked and plundered."

He looked into the opening a full minute before he moved again, and then he went over to a chair.

Yes, he had been plundered.

The secret which he had guarded so well had fallen into other hands, and, of course, into those of the enemy.

Captain Sly could realize what this meant.

"I think I know whose hand did it," he suddenly cried. "I think I've seen a few things within the past few days. Some people want everything. They don't want a divide, but would take everything in sight. I'll block this game and make the thief disgorge. I'll show him yet to-night that he can't hold the spoil. It belongs to me."

He searched the house, but found nothing that rewarded him till he was about to quit it.

At the door of the room where the robbery had taken place, his foot struck something and he picked it up.

Captain Sly held in his hand a small, old-fashioned knife.

He laughed like a fiend as he held it up in the light and gazed at it.

It proclaimed the identity of its owner as surely as though that person stood before him.

"This is enough to hang him," he exclaimed. "It is all the evidence I want. I'll show him that it is death to rob Slicker Sly. I am the rending lion in this play!"

He left the house and went back to New York.

From the wharf he hurried away, and was soon lost to sight among the tangle of half-lighted streets.

Captain Sly turned up half an hour later in front of a small house in a still street.

He took a key from his pocket and unlocked the door.

In the hall he stopped and listened.

Not a sound came to his ears, and for some time he stood there against the wall with his ears on the alert.

"Not at home, eh? We'll see!"

He advanced down the hallway and laid his hand on a latch.

Before he could open the door it opened in his face, and he confronted Billy Ciphers.

For a second the two men stood face to face, the tool showing in his countenance.

the effects of his startling adventure across the river, and the face of Captain Sly stern and merciless.

Billy might have known what was coming; perhaps he did.

He held the door open for his partner, and the captain passed into the little apartment.

Billy was dressed; he had thrown himself upon the bed after his return, and thus Sly found him with his clothes on.

"Were you going out, Billy?" asked the captain.

"I might have gone, but just now I was taking a little nap."

"Been across the river, haven't you?"

The keen eyes of Captain Sly seemed to pierce the man whom he addressed, and Billy appeared to recoil.

"Do you mean to-night?" he asked.

"To-night. You've been across the river."

"I did go over there to see if everything was right about the other house."

"And you found—"

"Everything seemed right, and I left well enough alone without going in."

Captain Sly's hand closed on the pen-knife in his pocket and a smile crossed his face.

He had convincing proof to the contrary.

"You're quite sure you didn't enter, Billy?"

"Quite sure."

Then from the pocket came the tell-tale knife.

Billy Ciphers fell back. The mute witness confounded him.

"It talks, Billy," suggested the captain. "I'll take the documents."

The balked Billy was unable to speak.

"The papers!" repeated Captain Sly. "Where are they?"

"I haven't them."

"Bah! Don't tell me that you haven't got what you carried off to-night. Come, sir, you can't hoodwink Captain Sly. I am here for those documents."

What could Billy say, sure as he was that the Dock Dodger had taken possession of them, yet he did not care to tell the captain this.

With the coolness of the practiced villain, Captain Sly took his watch and glanced at it.

"One minute, Billy," said he. "I'll be liberal with you. You have one minute in which to lay hands on the papers for me."

"But I can't."

"You've delivered them up, then?"

"I did not do that, either."

"Where, then, are they?"

The tool was silent.

"Twenty seconds—not one more!" the captain warned over the watch.

"Five seconds! Man, what are you going to do?"

"I was robbed!" blurted Billy, in his desperation.

"Robbed?" repeated Captain Sly. "Where, man?"

"Across the river."

"But you confess that you went thither to plunder me?"

"I confess that the temptation was very great."

"More than you could withstand, eh?"

"Curse it, yes!"

"You found the documents, did you?"

"I discovered the button in the wall, and the door opened. I didn't intend to carry off the papers. I only wanted to see if we had a sure hold on the fortune."

Captain Sly was not to be deceived.

"Well? Go on, Billy," he commanded.

"The little bag did the job for me," avowed Ciphers. "I was knocked over by it, and while I was unconscious on the floor I was robbed in turn."

"By whom?"
 "You ought to be able to guess."
 "Was it Tom Cleaver?"
 "Would say not. I believe the white boy followed me."
 "The detective's Dock Dodger, eh? The boy has given us a good deal of trouble. I ought to kill you in your tracks, traitor!"
 Billy Ciphers recoiled like a wild beast in the cage, ready to spring.
 Captain Sly seemed to divine his intention to break for the door, and placed himself between Billy and the exit.
 "Not yet, my man," grinned the captain. "You have ruined the game. You will never see the divide, and your eager hands won't close on a single dollar of the Manson fortune."
 "But the girl?"
 "Irma? You have killed all her chances, too, for without my hand, she can't get a dollar."
 "Not if she were Manson's true heir?"
 "You don't think she's that, do you? Come, Billy, you haven't let this idea get into your noggin?"
 "I thought it might be so."
 Sly burst into a laugh.
 "Well, let me emphasize the fact that you've played traitor a little too soon. You've lost the golden egg by killing the goose. You have failed with your little side scheme. Good-night. Follow me, or peach, and your life won't be worth that!" and Captain Sly, with blood in his eye, snapped his fingers in Billy's face as he turned toward the door.
 Billy breather freer once more; he was alive, and that was a good deal.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE THOROUGHBREDS' ROUND-UP.

It was a short time after the meeting of Captain Sly with the man whom he now called traitor that Toby Tip, who had run across Zip Coppers, approached a certain house where they expected to find Irma.

The two Dodgers had decided not to call in Cleaver, but to play out the hand themselves.

Snowdrop had promised Toby to come forward with his confession whenever wanted, and the boy ferret was feeling that he was about to achieve a splendid triumph.

The house looked dark enough, and this, for a moment, discouraged the boy pards.

Perhaps Irma had already been visited by Captain Sly and carried off to another hiding place, or, mayhap, Billy Ciphers, left in the house over in Jersey, had come to and crossed the river again.

Toby investigated, and made out that a dim light burned beyond the door.

At this discovery, he left Zip on guard and managed to effect an entrance.

The place was quiet enough, and he was in the act of opening a door in the hall, when he heard a peculiar noise—the danger signal from Zip!

The dusky detective on the outside was watching a person who was nearing the house.

The manner of the man's walk and the secrecy of his movements admonished Zip to put Toby on his guard, and, sure enough, he soon discovered that this was right, for the man soon ran up the steps and stopped at the door.

"It's Cap'n Sly," thought Zip. "He's come to see d'e girl, an' Toby's in d'ar'. Hit won't do for him to run ag'in' Toby in d'at house, for d'ar' may be a settlement w'ot would disappoint d'e law."

In another instant the door was opened and Captain Sly vanished within, for the sleek scoundrel it was!

The darky detective did not seek to follow.

"Toby's able to take keer o' hisself," said he, under his breath. "I'se put heah on guard, an' hit's d'e place for Zip Coppers."

Warned by the signal, Toby had fallen back to the deep shadows of the staircase and saw the front door open.

"It's the captain," he muttered. "Now for the final tussle."

Sleek Sly stood for half a second in the hallway, and then stepped hastily toward the door through which Toby had reached the hall. This door he passed.

"Irma, come down here," the Dodger heard called.

In response there came from somewhere a half-smothered, eager voice, and Toby heard some one run down a flight of steps which he could not see.

"Here I am," said the girl.

"Good! Don't you know that we are nearly losing the whole game? It's terrible, child!"

"Losing it?" echoed Irma. "Impossible! Why, you told me but this morning that failure was impossible, and—"

"I did, but it is possible now, unless—less—"

"Unless what, Captain?"

"Unless you get away from the city. You must hide—hide away from these men and the boy shadowers on our trail."

"I'm ready. But, first, tell me—you will do it now, won't you?—if I am really Manson's heir. I don't want the fortune if I have to play false for it," she persisted, evidently determined on her purpose.

"You don't, eh? You're nice all at once."

"I don't want to rob a dead man. I don't want, and I won't take, a dollar of Martin Manson's wealth if it is not rightfully mine. I have heard Gloster's plea for honesty—"

"You have, eh? You've met him, have you?"

"I have met him!" The voice was resolute.

"And doubtless you told him all about our scheme, going back on the man who raised you from a babe to make you rich one of these days. You're a pretty bird, you are!"

A moment's silence followed this retort.

"Aren't you coming?" demanded the man.

"When you tell me the truth. When you tell me if I am Martin Manson's child or whether I am only a nameless stool pigeon in your hands."

An imprecation fell from Captain Sly's tongue.

"You will go, or you will remain here until they find you—dead!" he cried, venomously.

"Don't! don't! Have mercy! For Heaven's sake don't hold me like that!"

"Submit, then! You want the fortune. You've been tractable until now. And, by Jove! you either help me to the end of the game or you never become the wife of Gloster Kane! That I swear!"

There was a half-suppressed ejaculation from Irma as Toby Tip opened the door.

The light in the room was rather dim, but he could see that Irma was in Captain Sly's grip—that her face was white and tensely drawn with fear and pain.

Truly, she was in a monster's hands!

She saw Toby first, for Captain Sly's back was toward the door.

She gasped, but did not speak; a rescuer had come!

"Unhand the girl!" rang out Toby's voice, and the captain turned to look into the muzzle of a revolver held in the Dodger's nervy hand.

Instantly Irma was released, and she fell back to the wall.

"I thought so," was all that the sleek scoundrel said.

Then came more sounds in the hall, and the shiny face of Zip appeared in the doorway.

The villain had been double-banked!

The boy thoroughbreds held in their meshes one of the most adroit scamps of his day, and Captain Sly saw that his devil's dance was up.

But an hour after this occurrence Tom Cleaver stopped a man on the street—our old acquaintance, Billy Ciphers, who, strange to say, was on his way to police headquarters with the intention of betraying the captain!

Irma, saved at last from becoming a criminal in the hands of Captain Sly, rejoiced exceedingly, and willingly exchanged her place of abode.

Snowdrop kept his word with Toby.

The burglar, who turned out to be a former friend of Martin Manson, told how he was led to help abduct the broker's child, and how, soon afterward, he lost sight of her.

He went to the broker's office that fatal night to plunder it, but unexpectedly found Manson there.

He had overdone the gagging operation, and instead of coming out of it all right, the broker had perished in the chair.

Snowdrop was tried and given a long term in prison—they could not hold him for murder in the first degree—and he seemed glad to get off with his life.

As for the chief villain in the game for gold, Captain Sly, the sleekest scoundrel of all, he was so well enmeshed that escape was impossible, and the very longest term the law could give him he got, the court only lamenting its inability to give him a few years more.

The documents proved a real sensation.

While they contained a good deal of worthless matter, they attested that Irma was the child of Martin Manson, and consequently his only heir, all his wealth, which was considerable, falling to her.

Only for the Dock Dodgers, the game of Captain Sly and Billy Ciphers would have been successful, and Irma would, in turn, have been robbed by the utterly conscienceless villains.

Tom Cleaver was not inclined to take any credit for the successful outcome of the game, but turned it all over to the Dock Dodgers, Toby and Zip, for it was true, as Zip remarked:

"D'at's Tom Cleaver all ober! He's worth his weight in diamonds, d'e whitest man-ketcher in New York, an' d'e biggest-hearted 'tective in d'e world!"

And what shall we say of Toby Tip and pard?

We'll leave the reader to speak our sentiments for us.

THE END.

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